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Small enterprises in Sweden

Health and safety and the significance of intermediaries
in preventive health and safety

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Preface

This report is the Swedish part of the SALTSA B project, Health and safety in small enterprises in Europe: The significance and sustainability of the translator function of intermediaries in preventive health and safety. The aim of the entire project has been;

- To give an overview of health and safety in small enterprises in some countries within the European Union based on available information and literature. As a background, the existing infrastructure relevant to health and safety in small enterprises is described. This report describes the situation in Sweden. Other reports have been written for Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- To describe and to some extent also evaluate examples of intermediaries who have supported successful and sustainable improvement of health and safety in small enterprises. In this report, Swedish regional safety representatives have been chosen as one example and Growth Potential Objective 4 has been chosen as the other example.
- This Swedish report is also written to give an overview of the current situation in Sweden regarding small enterprises and health and safety. In an international perspective, comparisons can be made with the situation in other countries e.g. regarding the prevalence of small enterprises in different sectors, their economic situation and the existing supportive infrastructure in terms of legislation, organisations and social security. The present status of health and safety as reflected in statistics is presented and discussed. Finally the intermediaries which have been and still are very important to health and safety in small enterprises are discussed both in relation to the extent of contacts they have with small enterprises as well as what kind of health and safety related issues they usually deal with in these contacts. The presentation is limited by the information available from publicly available sources.

Project leader for the SALTSA B project is Ph D David Walters, Southbank University in London. The SALTSA B programme is funded by the National Institute for Working Life. This report for which Ph D Ann-Beth Antonsson at the Swedish Environmental Research Institute has been the project leader is funded separately by the National Institute for Working Life.

Based on the national reports, a book describing small enterprises in Europe and the role of intermediaries has been written by David Walters. This book, *Health and Safety in Small Enterprises. European Strategies for Managing Improvement* was published in 2001 by SALTSA in the Series “Work and Society”, No 31.

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1. Facts about small enterprises

1.1 Definitions of small enterprises

In Sweden the most commonly used definition of small enterprises, when discussing health and safety, are enterprises with less than 50 employees. This is also the limit where enterprises are required to have a safety committee, which is a committee of employers and employees representatives meeting at least four times a year to plan and follow the work regarding health and safety issues in the enterprise (Arbetsmiljölagen chap. 6, § 8). The presence of a safety committee is supposed to affect the working environment positively and thus the absence of a safety committee contributes to the greater problems small enterprises are supposed to have with health and safety.

Other definitions of small enterprises are also used in Sweden. Small enterprises have been defined as enterprises with less than 200 employee's (Proposition 1977/78:40) including smaller enterprises with less than 50 employees and medium-sized ones with 50-200 employees.

In this report a limit of 50 is normally used. In some cases other limits are used and in these cases the limit is indicated within the text. As the trend in Sweden is towards downsizing and the division of enterprises into many smaller enterprises, it should be noted that in general when talking about small enterprises, the small enterprises that are part of a group or owned by holding enterprises are usually included.

1.2 Number of small enterprises – time trends

During the 1990s, the number of private small enterprises has increased steadily. The largest increase has been in one-person-enterprises (Lundström et al. 1998).

In 1998 Sweden had 803 600 active private enterprises. 157 100 of these, were active in the agriculture sector. More than 99 per cent of the active private enterprises had less than 200 employees. In 1998, excluding the agriculture sector 760 enterprises had more than 200 employees (Linder 1999).

During 1997 2.3 million people were working in the private sector in Sweden. Of these, 1.5 million worked within enterprises with less than 200 employees.

Statistics from 1993, 1996 and 1998 on the number of private enterprises in Sweden are compiled in table 1.

In table 2, the development from 1984 to 1993 is described. In this table the number of enterprises is given per million inhabitants and broken down by size.

Table 1. Number of private enterprises (including agriculture) and number of employees, excluding agriculture, broken down according to size for the years 1993 and 1996. Enterprises without employees mean enterprises with no employees except the owner. The numbers of employees include the owner (Johansson 1998, Linder 1999). In the figures for 1998 (Linder 1999) neither the agriculture sector nor share-holding enterprises that are publicly owned are included.

Size	Number of enterpr. 1993	Number of enterpr. 1996	Number of enterpr. 1998	Share of total 1993	Share of total 1996	Share of total 1998	Number of employees 1993	Number of employees 1996	Number of employees 1998	Share of total 1993	Share of total 1996	Share of total 1998
No employees ^{a)}	254 899	313 110	458 341	59.8	62.3	71.3	254 899	313 110	366 095	12.0	12.4	17.0
1-9	146 585	161 078	176 231	34.4	32.1	27.4	401 577	439 199	662 724	18.9	17.4	30.7
10-19	13 129	14 769		3.1	2.9		175 293	197 059		8.3	7.8	
20-49	7 279	8 616	7 896	1.7	1.7	1.2	216 287	256 675	237 398	10.2	10.2	11.0
Sum, small enterprises	421 892	497 573	642 558	99.1	99.1	99.9	1 048 056	1 206 043	1 266 217	49.3	47.9	58.7
50-99	2 162	2 581		0.5	0.5		147 815	177 430		7.0	7.0	
100-199	1 011	1 207	3 240	0.2	0.2	0.5	139 737	166 225	287 515	6.6	6.6	13.3
Sum, small and medium-sized enterprises	425 065	501 361	645 798	99.8	99.8		1 335 608	1 549 698	1 553 732	62.9	61.5	72.0
200-499	617	734	493	0.1	0.1		185 589	216 353	147 288	8.7	8.6	6.8
500-	367	432	269	0.1	0.1		601 067	752 183	456 400	28.3	29.9	21.2
Sum, large enterprises	984	1 166	762	0.2	0.2		786 656	968 536	603 688	37.1	38.5	28.0
Total	426 049	502 527	646 560	100.0	100.0		2 122 264	2 518 234	2 157 420	100.0	100.0	100.0

a) Enterprises with no employees are enterprises where only the owner works. Some of these enterprises do not employ the owner on a full-time basis. As the table shows, these enterprises constitute the majority of enterprises.

Table 2. Number of enterprises in the entire private sector per million inhabitants and broken down according to size. Numbers are given for 1984 and 1993. Numbers are corrected for enterprises belonging to groups. Note that enterprises with 0-1 employee are excluded (Johansson 1998).

Entire private sector				Manufacturing industry		
Number of employees in enterprises	1984	1993	Change %	1984	1993	Change %
2-4	5705	7232	27	683	741	8
5-9	2574	2933	14	450	439	-2
10-19	1340	1360	1	321	246	-23
20-49	705	696	-1	219	171	-22
50-99	210	191	-9	78	58	-26
100-199	92	85	-8	39	26	-33
200-499	54	54	0	22	23	5
500+	39	35	-10	19	16	-16

When interpreting the numbers in tables 1 and 2, one has to keep in mind that the total economy in Sweden has gone through rapid changes during the 1990s. In 1990 a recession in the Swedish economy started, which initiated vast changes in Swedish enterprises. Unemployment rose from about two per cent to about eight (Statistics Sweden 1999) (or 11-12 per cent: Numbers vary depending on what they reflect and especially depending on whether people in various kinds of labour market policy programmes are included or not). The recession was quite severe during the first years of the 1990s, but from about 1994 onwards the Swedish economy has developed quite well and the unemployment rate was around six per cent in the beginning of 2000 (*ibid.*) and had decreased to four per cent in November 2000.

During the recession, many large enterprises downsized and divided their activities into several smaller enterprises within a group. Thus the numbers above also reflect this development amongst large Swedish enterprises. Additionally, many people and activities were out-sourced and many of those that were out-sourced started their own enterprises. In many cases they worked part time as consultants for their former employers. This may, to some extent, explain the increase in the number of enterprises without employees in table 1.

When it comes to the creation of new jobs, the newly established small enterprises created about 65 000 new jobs annually between 1990-93 and an additional 118 000 were created by expanding existing establishments. This corresponds to 75 per cent and 64 per cent respectively of all jobs created in these ways during a period when about half of all privately employed people were employed in small enterprises. About 75 per cent of all jobs that disappeared due to the closure of establishments disappeared from the small enterprise sector. 52 per cent of the reduction took place in the small enterprise sector. As a whole, 67 per cent of the job increases took place in the small enterprise sector and only 30 per cent of the job losses took place amongst small enterprises. This trend increased as the economy improved during 1994 (Persson 1997). Analyses have shown that for the small enterprise sector, the recession struck later and less severely and when the economy improved, jobs were created earlier and to a larger extent than in large enterprises (*ibid.*).

Table 3 shows the number of new shareholder owned enterprises and the number of such enterprises that were wound up during the period between 1992 and 1998.

Table 3. New and wound up shareholder's enterprises between 1992 and 1998.

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Enterprises registered during the year	19 006	19 567	22 849	22 230	9 215	13 162	13 430
Enterprises wound up during the year	9 151	15 870	18 199	16 791	15 225	28 563	24 706
Registered enterprises in existence at end of year:							
in operation	290 852	294 906	299 801	307 991	300 900	268 374	270 920
winding up	40 147	43 268	46 112	41 616	38 287	21 335	6 299

Even if the numbers in table 3 relate to the total number of share holder's enterprises, there is no doubt that the vast majority of registered and wound up enterprises are small ones.

1.3 Small enterprises and economy

The figures from 1996 show that small and medium-sized enterprises (those with less than 250 employees) accounted for about half of the employment in the total business sector and 37 per cent of the value added (gross profit before depreciation plus labour costs). Additionally they accounted for 32 per cent of the investments in tangible assets. Only three per cent of the total exports came from these enterprises and only one per cent of research costs (Statistics Sweden 1996).

A comparison of international and Swedish enterprises active in Sweden, shows that of the Swedish enterprises, the small ones (1-49 employees) invested most. The smallest enterprises (0 employees) were the most profitable ones.

1.4 Small enterprises in the global setting

In table 4, the number of Swedish and international enterprises, of various sizes, active within Sweden, are accounted for. Even though there seem to be some uncertainties in the figures, it seems obvious that the vast majority of small enterprises (1-49 employees) are purely Swedish. There seem to be about twice as many small Swedish enterprises having affiliated foreign enterprises as there are small foreign enterprises affiliating with Swedish companies. When it comes to large enterprises, the vast majority of employees work in enterprises with some kind of international affiliation.

Table 4. Swedish enterprises with affiliated enterprises internationally. The table is an extract from several tables in (Statistics Sweden 1996).

	Number of employees			
	0	1-49	50-249	250 -
Swedish enterprises with foreign affiliated enterprises	1 164	3 294	1 027	356
Number of employees	0	48 011	108 036	461 154
Share of total employees in enterprises of same size	-	5,5	12,3	52,4
Swedish enterprises which are affiliated to international enterprises	421	1 790	645	215
Number of employees	0	27 912	71 799	163 584
Share of total employees in enterprises of same size	0	3,2	8,2	18,6
Share of total employees in enterprises with Swedish/international affiliation	-	8,7	20,5	71,0
Home market enterprises	88 742	165 214	1 437	59
Number of employees	0	710 034	122 830	19 449
Share of total employees in SMEs/large enterpr.	-	69,7	12,1	1,9

98 per cent of exporting enterprises have less than 200 employees and these enterprises account for about 17 per cent of the exported value from Sweden. Even if Sweden has many small enterprises exporting products and services, the export value is greatest amongst the large enterprises.

1.5 In what sectors are small enterprises active?

In table 5, the number of enterprises of different sizes in different sectors is accounted for (Statistics Sweden 1999). It is obvious that even though all sectors contain small enterprises, there are some sectors that are heavily dominated by small enterprises. Such sectors are, for example, agriculture, fishing, wholesale and retail trade and repair and hotels and restaurants. In some sectors there are many large or very large enterprises but also a lot of small ones, e.g. in construction, manufacturing and transport, storage and communication, real estate, renting and business activities.

In 1997 about 80 per cent of the enterprises with less than 200 employees belonged to the service sector and they employed about 853 000 people, which is 82 per cent of all employees in the service sector. 57 per cent of all workers in the service sector worked in enterprises with up to 19 employees, which means that the service sector is a sector heavily dominated by small enterprises.*

* Presentation on the homepage of Företagarnas Riksorganisation, <http://www.fr.se>.

Table 5. Enterprises broken down according to economic activity and size according to Swedish NACE-codes, 1998 (Statistics Sweden 1999).

Economic activity	Size group (number of employees)										Total		
	0	1	2-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-99	100-199	200-499	500-	enterprises	employees	
A. Agriculture, hunting and forestry	146 699	4 519	3 546	890	274	92	21	3	10	4	156 058	33 385	
B. Fishing	970	59	63	23	7	0	0	0	0	0	1 122	459	
C. Mining and quarrying	293	65	104	77	30	17	5	7	2	2	602	9 117	
D. Manufacturing	26 756	4 498	7 256	4 599	3 090	2 226	921	479	313	225	50 363	712 602	
E. Electricity, water and gas supply	732	50	58	53	70	106	35	28	17	10	1 159	26 311	
F. Construction	29 376	6 740	8 013	3 434	1 777	760	150	42	23	27	50 342	180 084	
G. Wholesale and retail trade, repair	71 415	12 950	19 434	8 864	4 110	2 059	530	208	113	52	119 735	422 930	
H. Hotels and restaurants	11 503	2 345	3 300	1 693	815	486	103	28	18	9	20 300	79 073	
I. Transport, storage and communications	16 941	5 003	5 298	2 357	1 218	574	170	70	46	42	31 719	239 524	
J. Financial intermediation	3 045	783	719	248	155	110	67	47	22	17	5 213	81 941	
K. Real estate, renting and business activities	114 155	20 428	15 010	4 859	2 356	1 338	433	213	125	61	158 978	360 071	
L. Public administration and defence, compulsory social security	382	63	45	21	30	30	16	42	63	41	733	137 308	
M. Education	4 539	641	912	553	335	254	82	29	20	27	7 392	139 745	
N. Health and social work	8 823	1 747	2 882	1 297	562	326	97	44	46	290	16 114	934 003	
O. Other community, social and personal service activities	36 789	7 430	5 941	2 339	1 275	696	204	92	39	11	54 816	126 808	
P. Private households with employed persons	5	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	4	
Q. Extra-territorial organisations and bodies	34	8	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	45	27	
X. Not classifiable by economic activity	135 182	420	33	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	135 637	553	
Total	607 639	67 753	72 615	31 309	16 105	9 075	2 834	1 332	857	818	810 337	3 483 945	
Share of all enterprises %	75.0	8.4	9.0	3.9	2.0	1.1	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	100		

1.6 How are small enterprises owned?

The proportion of enterprises owned by shareholders increases with the number of employees. In 1996 71 per cent of enterprises with 1-4 employees were shareholder's enterprises (NUTEK 1996). The share of enterprises which are family-owned decreases with an increasing number of employees. In 1994 80 per cent of enterprises in the manufacturing industry with 0-9 employees were family-owned (NUTEK 1994).

One interesting aspect of ownership is the reason for small enterprises being established. In Sweden:

- Many enterprises are established with the aim *not* to grow and employ more people, while other enterprises are established strategically on a market and grow very rapidly.
- The main factors that stop small enterprises from growing are factors as competition, market, lack of time, lack of risk capital and deficiencies in marketing (SCB 1996).

The impression is that during the recession in the Swedish economy, many small enterprises were established as people were out-sourced and asked to establish their own enterprises in order to act as subcontractors to their former employers. These enterprises were established to provide work and a livelihood to their owners as a substitute for employment.

The share of private enterprises that are affiliated to a larger organisation/group of enterprises has increased, from six per cent in 1979 to 14 in 1998 for small enterprises (<50 employees) and from 58 per cent to 73 for large and medium sized enterprises (>50 employees). There are big differences between trades. In some sectors, enterprises with no affiliation form the largest category, e.g. in agriculture and hunting, education, forestry and recreational, cultural and sporting activities.*

1.7 Employees in small enterprises

74 per cent of white-collar workers and 85 of blue-collar workers are organised within unions (Kjellberg 1997). Employees in small enterprises are organised in labour unions to quite a high degree, even though the degree of membership is probably generally a bit lower in small enterprises than in large ones. About 50 per cent of employees in enterprises with 1-9 employees and about 75 per cent in enterprises with 11-50 employees are members of trade unions (Frick & Walters 1998). Additionally, there are some sectors where employees tend to be less organised, e.g. within the IT-sector, though the number of employees organised in trade unions now have increased in the IT-sector due to increased unemployment.

* Statistics especially compiled for this report by Lars Sundbom and Tor Larsson, SAMU, Uppsala.

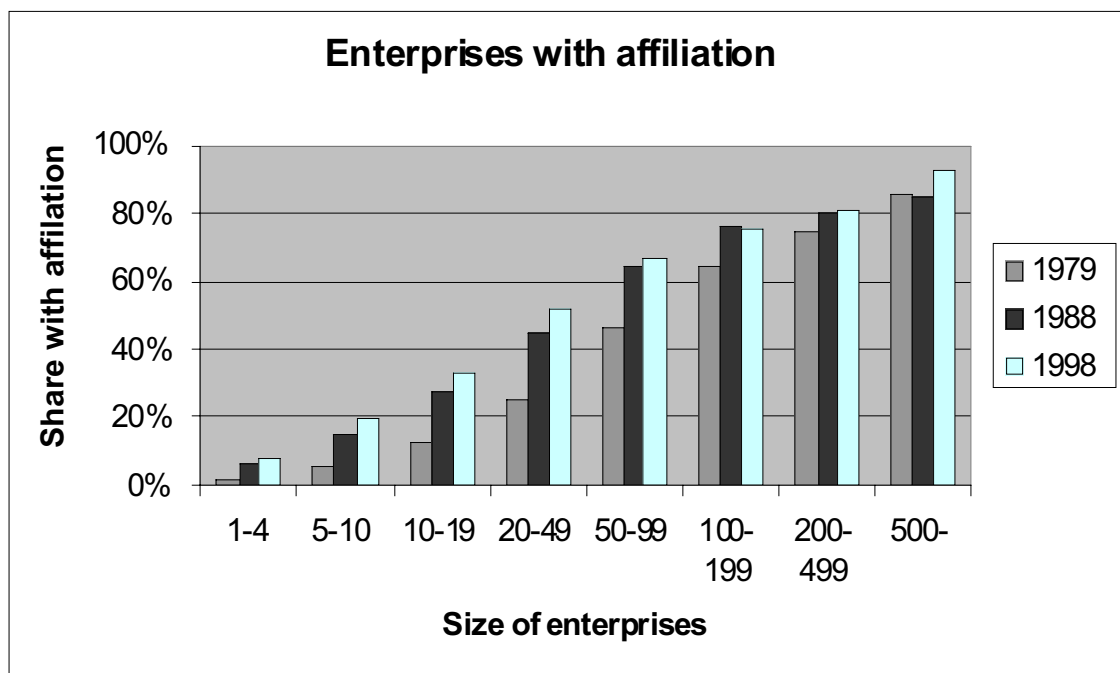


Figure 1. Percentage of enterprises, of different sizes, affiliated to a larger organisation/group of enterprises. Private sector only (Source: See previous footnote).

Figure 1 shows that the share of enterprises with affiliation has steadily increased between 1979 and 1998 for companies with less than 100 employees. The most marked increase has taken part in the group with 10-19 employees, where the share of enterprises with affiliation has doubled.

Two studies from the 1970s indicate that employees are less involved in work regarding the working environment in small enterprises than in large ones. Employees, including safety representatives, are less aware of occupational health and safety risks. Additionally they are reluctant to put demands regarding their working environment on the managers that they are dependent on (SOU 1972:86, Kronlund et al. 1978). Of course this situation may have changed since the 1970s. In a recent study (Johansson 1998), however, there are signs that many employees are quite passive regarding their working environment. This is explained by the culture within many small enterprises, which is quite authoritarian.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a strong trend in research regarding the working environment has been to focus on the organisation of work. This has resulted in many projects where the organisation of work has been changed in enterprises, employees have got more responsibilities, more education and a more varied pattern of work. The change in the organisation of work has taken place in small, medium-sized and large enterprises. The overall impression however is that this change has gone further in large enterprises than in small ones. There are, however, many small enterprises that have changed their way of organising their work. Some of them are described in a thesis (Johansson 1998), where a positive correlation is found between a modern organisation of work including workers participation and a good working environment.

One interesting aspect of small enterprises is the relation between large and small enterprises. Sweden has many large enterprises that tend to be very dominating in their respective areas. These large enterprises are not considered to be a problem as such. However, they have not been very active in supporting local small enterprises and have instead tended to hamper the development of networks for small enterprises rather than support them (Berggren et al. 1998).

1.8 Which organisations are small enterprises attached to?

Sweden is a country with many organisations and a large proportion of enterprises and employees are organised in one of various ways.

The dominating organisation for private enterprises is the Swedish Employers Federation (Svenska Arbetsgivareföreningen), SAF, which organises almost all large private enterprises in Sweden and many small ones. SAF is an employer's organisation that deals with many different aspects of business and market relations. The 39 sectoral organisations within SAF negotiate on matters such as salaries and employment conditions.

In table 6, the number of Swedish enterprises organised in SAF are accounted for in relation to the number of employees in the enterprises and the total number of employees in all the enterprises within each size category.

Table 6. Number of Swedish enterprises of different sizes which are members of SAF (Source: Presentation on the homepage of Swedish Employers Federation http://www.saf.se/detta/bildpresentation_12htm).

Number of employees	Number of enterprises that are members of SAF	Total number of employees in the SAF-enterprises
– 10	28 000	100 000
11 – 200	12 000	450 000
201 -	890	675 000

SAF organises between 15 and 20 per cent of the smallest enterprises (enterprises with less than ten employees). Their negotiations with the employee's organisations have a much wider impact, as many enterprises, especially small ones, have so called affiliated collective agreements which usually means that the enterprises apply the same agreements as other enterprises that *are* members of SAF.

Another large organisation which organises many small enterprises is The Federation of Private Enterprises (Företagarnas Riksorganisation), FR. FR has 60 000 owners of small and medium sized private enterprises as members. FR also encompasses an additional 30 000 small businesses through 32 affiliated trade associations, e.g. hairdressers. FR has 18 regional offices and is organised in 25 district organisations, 328 local organisations and 32 trade organisations. FR is an organisation that works on the political arena and lobbies on various topics concerning enterprises. It also acts as a forum for enterprises through its local organisations.*

A third organisation is the Swedish Industry Association, (Svensk Industrieförening), Sinf. It is a national organisation for small and medium-sized indus-

* Presentation on the homepage of Företagarnas Riksorganisation, <http://www.fr.se>.

tries. Sinf organises twenty different trade associations. Most of the 1 800 members are active in the sectors of engineering, plastics, electronics, food producing and textiles. Sinf is growing in new sectors such as IT, environment and recycling. Sinf has a special interest in subcontracting industries. Sinf's main services are in the field of business services and commercial policy, with an emphasis on information, assistance and advice on legal and financial matters.

Another sector is non-profit organisations, e.g. sports clubs of which many in fact have employees. About 1 420 are members of Employer's Alliance (Arbetsgivaralliansen), and about 580 are members in the Swedish Employer's Association for Non-profit Organisations (Arbetsgivarförbundet för ideella organisationer), Idea, which is a part of the Swedish Federation of Trade and Service, a sectoral organisation within SAF. This sector is not discussed further within this report.

Regionally and locally, there are also organisations for enterprises. The Swedish Employers Federation (SAF) has a regional organisation subdivided into 19 regions. The purpose of the regional organisation is to provide local information, opinion forming, service and guidance. The regional organisations also arrange meeting places to allow enterprises to exchange experience and initiate dialogues.

The Federation of Private Enterprises also has regional and local organisations, providing information and arranging various kinds of activities and meetings for their members. In some regions there are trade organisations, arranging activities for particular trades.

Amongst these organisations, SAF is noticeable for its activity in the field of working environment, supporting their members in various ways concerning OHS. There are also several ombudsmen, both within SAF's central organisation and within most of SAF's 39 sectoral organisations, that work part or full-time with working environment related issues. The Federation of Private Enterprises, the Swedish Employer's Association for Non-profit Organisations and the Employer's Alliance are also involved in issues to do with the working environment on a regular basis.

In addition to this, there are many other local organisations and networks for small enterprises or owners of small enterprises. See section 1.14.

1.9 Support networks for small enterprises

Some of the local networks for small enterprises are related to the national organisations that organise enterprises and their local or regional organisations. This has been accounted for above (see section 1.5).

Several different surveys have studied which contacts are important to small enterprises. A survey in which 381 enterprises in northern Sweden gave their opinions on several topics, showed, not surprisingly, that more than 90 per cent had used their clients often or very often as information sources, 76 per cent used newspapers, 67 colleagues, 50 intermediaries, 36 exhibitions and 24 seminars as information sources (Alström & Höglund 1995).

Other networks relevant to small enterprises are the ALMI Group (ALMI Företagspartner), which is an organisation owned jointly by government and county councils. ALMI is divided into 22 regional enterprises with offices in 40

cities, in order to facilitate contact with local enterprises. ALMI's mission is to stimulate growth and employment in small and medium-sized enterprises. ALMI offers loans to SMEs that can grow and want to grow. ALMI also provides business information, business-development programmes and consultative services. ALMI should not compete with existing local commercial services. ALMI meets approximately 100 000 SMEs and potential SMEs each year. 24 000 of these become involved in extensive development programs. ALMI is mainly concerned with business development. During the last decade, effort has been put into management systems for quality and environment. In some cases working environment aspects have been included in these activities and programmes have started to integrate management systems with the Swedish compulsory systematic work environment management, which in fact is a very simple form of management system. There have also been some attempts with projects where ALMI should provide support regarding OHS to SMEs (Lindström 1984), but these attempts seem to have been neither successful nor sustainable.

There are few studies on the extent of networking among small enterprises. Active participants in the network decide network activities, not a central body. As a consequence it is difficult to give a general description of networks and if and how they support health and safety interventions.

Good relations and trust among the participants are requirements for a network to "stay alive". It is necessary to replace competition with co-operation.

There are many different kinds of networks among small Swedish enterprises. Some of the networks are formed as regional or local organisations belonging to a national organisation such as the Federation of Private Enterprises. Other networks are more of a meeting arena where, very often, owners and managers of small enterprises take part, such as Rotary Club and Lions. There are also many formal and informal local networks active in different ways. Locally there might, for example, be organisations for small industries, arranging regular meetings and discussing topics of common interest. There are also more informal networks, which might be of great importance and which are mainly based on personal relations and common interests. Such networks may be used where someone finds there to be a need.

In one Swedish region networks are considered more elaborate than in other regions. In parts of Småland, networking is seen as a way of working together with other enterprises in the same region in order to keep as much work as is possible within the region and improve the competence and development paths within the region.

There are also some rather new networks being built up based on the internet as the main method of communication. The largest internet-project in Sweden with a focus on increasing the competitiveness of SMEs is Smelink. The idea of Smelink is to provide tailored, strategic information and to build a platform for enterprises to find new partners and business opportunities. Smelink was started in 1996 based on discussions within private enterprise in the city of Jönköping, with connections to the University and a private foundation, Knut & Alice Wallenberg Foundation. Smelink also contains information on working environment as part of the information on environmental management systems.

One of the rare studies on SMEs and networks examined three electronic networks in Gotland. The focus was on how networks are formed, on their development and how to sustain networking, and what demands there are on and from those participating in networks. The study also looked into how the work situation and role of small entrepreneurs was affected by co-operation within the network. The study shows that co-operation in networks gives opportunities for mutual use of resources and the sharing of common cost e.g. in marketing. Mutual exchange of experience improves competence within the enterprises in the network. The network offers advantages compared to acting on your own as a small enterprise, for example because of better external confidence and because larger business actions can be achieved (Brulin 1998).

1.10 How are changes in society affecting small enterprises?

During the last decade, Swedish society has changed a lot. The boom at the end of the 1980s was replaced by a recession with far reaching effects on working life. At the end of the 1990s the Swedish economy is growing quite strongly. This growth is partly due to the restructuring of enterprises which took place in the beginning of the 1990s. This restructuring contained several elements which also effect small enterprises.

Some figures can be used to illustrate the change (Persson 1997). From 1990-93, the number of employees decreased by about 500 000. At the same time, there was hardly any decrease at all in the number of establishments. The largest reduction in jobs took place in the manufacturing industry (-187 000), the public sector (-145 000) and trade (-88 000). Despite the deep recession, employment increased in some sectors, including education, health care, engineering enterprises and other knowledge based enterprises. In the private sector, employment decreased mainly in Swedish-owned large enterprises. Establishments within small enterprises increased their share of total employment from 48 to 52 per cent, which is a remarkable structural shift. After 1994, as the economy has improved, small enterprises have continued to increase their share of employment in the public sector (ibid.).

Partly due to outsourcing, the number of small enterprises has grown. Many small enterprises give service or are suppliers to larger enterprises. In Sweden for example the car industry is quite strong with many suppliers. The car industry also acts as a strong and competent buyer, which puts demands on small enterprises and to some extent also helps them to develop their suppliers. It has been argued that large enterprises support their suppliers too little, which hampers small industry development (Berggren et al. 1998). The car industry is probably a very important driving force for small enterprises' work with management systems for quality and environment (ISO 9000 and 14 001). The use of these kinds of management system has also spread among Many small enterprises have implemented such management systems during the 1990s (Antonsson 2000).

A strong and visible trend is that the use of management systems has increased, along with the number of different types of management system increasing. A notable trend is that many sectors, including sectors with mainly small enterprises as members, are developing systems of their own for quality and environmental

management (Mårtensson 2000). There is an increasing interest in integrating working environment considerations into other management systems, even though there is still a lack in experience as to which methods for integration are successful and which are not (Antonsson 2000).

Downsizing has led to lean organisations and sometimes what has been called anorexic organisations. The restructuring has probably hit the largest enterprises hardest, but has also affected the smaller ones, for example the car industry has put demands on many of their suppliers to reduce costs by a certain percentage per annum. Additionally, the car industry in particular has begun to reduce their number of suppliers, which leads to the creation of supply chains, where one supplier takes a broader responsibility and acts as a main supplier with many sub-suppliers, which formerly were direct suppliers to the car industry.

During the 1980s and 1990s, franchising has increased and today there are many small enterprises that are parts of larger chains with a more or less defined concept. Franchising in Sweden shows slightly different characteristics than franchising in, for example, the USA. In Sweden there are more horizontal contacts (between enterprises on the same production level), which facilitate co-operation between enterprises. In the USA the contacts are mainly vertical – between the mother enterprise and franchisers with few, if any, horizontal contacts.* As franchising is growing and the franchisers are enterprises of their own, the number of small franchisers is growing. The franchisers are sometimes entirely new enterprises, built up around a specific concept. Existing enterprises are sometimes remodelled into franchises to create a stronger link to the enterprise whose products they are selling.

A general trend in Sweden during the first half of the 1990s is that unemployment has increased. This has led to a marked decrease in working environment activity and interest shown in OHS both in society in general and within many enterprises. This is also true for many small enterprises. In addition to this the trend towards lean organisations has led to an increase in overload at work and people suffering from burn out syndromes. So far, no research relating burn out syndrome to the size of the enterprise is available, but the problem probably exists amongst small enterprises too.

Within the field of working environment, a very noticeable trend is that the focus has continued to change, during the 1990s, from physical problems to organisational and psycho-social problems. This holds true for small enterprises. This change of focus does not mean that all physical working environment problems are solved, but rather that they are not given as much attention as they were earlier on.

* Personal communication with Bengt-Åke Wennberg, Samarbetsdynamik AB, Onsala, dec 1999.

2. Facts about health and safety in small enterprises

2.1 Hazards and risks in small enterprises

It is usually argued that the nature of risks depends more on the type of activity in the enterprise than the size. Basically this is true, at least for the physical aspects of the working environment. The use of machines, tools and chemical substances leads to similar risks, regardless of the size of the enterprise. Analysing the situation more thoroughly will indicate that there probably are some differences related to size (Antonsson 1997).

Analysis of the reported rate of work-related accidents and diseases in 1992 (SWEA & Statistics Sweden 1993), shows that cleaners in large enterprises reported work-related accidents and diseases twice as often as cleaners in small enterprises. A public investigation in 1993 stated that “this can hardly be right” (SOU 1993:8113). There are reasons to believe that this depends more on under-reporting from small enterprises than real differences in their working environment (SOU 1990:49, Bengtsson 1995).

The regular surveys of the Swedish labour force, made by Statistics Sweden, indicate that there are only minor differences between enterprises depending on size (1-49 employees, compared to 50-499 and more than 500 employees). It is not possible to decide whether these differences depend on differences in reporting work-related injuries between large and small enterprises or real differences in injuries between large and small enterprises.

The differences between trades are many times larger than the differences due to the size of the enterprises. There are significant differences in illness due to differences in working environment load (Frick 1996). Trades dominated by small enterprises, for example shops, have a very low frequency of work-related injuries and diseases and enterprises working with wooden products, products based on soil and stone, food products and beverages, agriculture and construction, have very high frequencies.

One characteristic of small enterprises is that work often varies a lot. A few people work and manage to do (almost) all the things that have to be done. This means that very often each person has many different work tasks. The exposure can thus be said to vary a lot, depending on which task is currently being carried out. In larger enterprises, work might be more monotonous due to a more Tayloristic or specialised organisation of work. Additionally, exposures may be a lot higher in small enterprises, since safeguards and other control measures tend not to be very elaborate, since each task takes a short time. Thus extensive precautions are often not considered necessary. The conclusion is that compared to large enterprises, small enterprises probably have higher exposures but for shorter times (Antonsson 1997). This hypothesis has, however, not yet been evaluated or verified.

Frick showed in 1979 that small independent enterprises worked in a less systematic and preventive way with their working environment than small establish-

ments that were part of a larger private or public organisation. In the latter case, the small establishments had various types of support, e.g. from policies, staff managers and safety committees (Frick 1979). Nise showed a similar result in 1995, where the risk of harmful exposure to chemicals was significantly higher in independent small enterprises than other small establishments (Nise et al. 1995).

2.2 Health and safety regulations relevant to small enterprises

2.2.1 Safety representatives

All enterprises with five or more employees should have a safety representative. Safety representatives are appointed by the trade unions or by the workers. Safety representatives shall take part in the work regarding health and safety at the workplace and have authorities according to that, e.g. to get information, take part in courses regarding health and safety on time paid by the employer and to stop hazardous work. Not all enterprises that should have safety representatives have, in fact, got them. There are, however, no figures relating the existence of safety representatives to the size of the enterprise.

In a recent study on safety representatives, it is estimated that about 21 000 enterprises have safety representatives, compared to about 107 500 enterprises with more than five employees that should have safety representatives (Arbets-tagarkonsult AB 2000). Accordingly here are safety representatives in only 20 per cent of the companies that are required to have safety representatives. It is obvious that safety representatives are more often missing in small enterprises than in large ones, even though no studies have been made to show this.

2.2.2 Systematic work environment management

Swedish legislation does not discriminate between enterprises based on their size. In general the same legislation applies to all enterprises regardless of how large they are. However there is one instance where it is obvious that the legislation is interpreted differently for small enterprises – the Swedish legislation on systematic work environment management, SWEM.

The regulation on SWEM, formerly named “internal control” is in force since January 1 1993. The regulation requires that the employer works systematically with the working environment in the enterprise. The regulation requires action related to the work environment in the company. The action resembles a simple management system, with e.g. work environment policy, identification of risks, action plans, follow-up of accidents and near-accidents and follow up of the work according to SWEM.

One of the final paragraphs in the regulation states that enterprises have to do “what is needed, depending on size, occupational hazards...” In practice, this means that the Work Environment Inspectorate normally accept much simpler systematic work environment management in small enterprises than in larger ones.

Even though all enterprises have to have systematic work environment management, more than 50 per cent of enterprises with less than 50 employees have not yet started to work with it (Statistics Sweden 1996).

2.2.3 Occupational Health Services

Legislation on the prevention of disease and accidents at work has existed in Sweden since the 19th century. The present Work Environment Act (WEA) dates from 1978. A new provision was added to the WEA from 1986, which stated that “if the working conditions so require, employers are to organise Occupational Health Services (OHS) to the extent which the activities demand”. The provision enabled the regional Work Environment Inspectorate to issue an employer with an injunction to affiliate his employees to Occupational Health Services in certain specific cases.

From the 1st of January 2000 there came into effect changes in the WEA that stress even more the demand on employers to organise OHS, whilst still not making it mandatory. A clear definition is added of what areas of expertise OHS must have.

The ILO Occupational Health Services Convention (No. 161) defines “occupational health services” as services entrusted with essentially preventive functions and responsible for advising the employer, the workers and their representatives in the undertaking on the requirements for establishing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment which will facilitate optimal physical and mental health in relation to work and the adaptation of work to the capabilities of workers in the light of their state of physical and mental health.*

In the Swedish Work Environment Act (Chapter 3, Section 2b) a definition is added as worded 1st January 2001:

”By occupational health services is meant an independent expert resource in the domains of the working environment and rehabilitation. Occupational health services shall in particular work for the prevention and elimination of health risks at workplaces, and shall have the competence to identify and describe connections between the working environment, organisation, productivity and health”.**

2.2.4 Social insurance

Two factors in Swedish social insurance are related to health and safety: Rehabilitation and the employer’s obligation to pay salaries for the first period of sick leave.

According to Swedish law, employers are obligated to provide work related *rehabilitation* for employees, if relevant, after

- four weeks of sick leave,
- six incidences or more of sick leave during one year,
- if an employee asks for/demands rehabilitation.

The employer is responsible for measures undertaken at the enterprise, including changes in work tools, equipment, workplace layout and the organisation of work.

* Rantanen, J and Fedotov, I. Standards, principles and approaches in occupational health services, <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/publ/encyc/contents.htm>

** The Work Environment Act - with commentary as worded on 1st January 2001
<http://www.av.se/english/legislation/chapter3.shtml>

The rehabilitation may be supported by medical staff and often occupational health services are involved.

The social insurance system in Sweden includes *compensation during sick leave*. However since 1992, the employer has to pay a reduced salary (80 per cent but not more than a maximum level) to employees on sick leave during the first fourteen days. Since 1993 the first day of sick leave is not paid for with two exceptions. If the next period of sick leave starts within five days after the previous one and after ten sick leaves during one year, the first day will be paid for.

It has been argued that this can become a heavy burden for small enterprises, if they employ people with or who develop some kind of chronic disease, causing a lot of sick leave. One argument for the increased responsibility of the employer is that this situation will make enterprises more aware of and concerned about how the working environment will affect the health and wellbeing of their employees. Thus the period was extended to four weeks during 1997 to April 1998, when it was changed once again and is, at the moment, 14 days. There is an option for small companies with a wage sum equal to about 20 employees to take out an insurance against high costs for the company-paid compensation during sick leave.

There have been discussions in Sweden regarding differentiated dues for social insurance to motivate enterprises to improve their working environment in order to reduce their dues. Until now, it has not been possible to develop such a system and get a broad acceptance for it. Rehabilitation is continuously being investigated and discussed. One of the main problems is related to small enterprises. How should the working environment status in small enterprises be judged, in order to provide a firm basis for a fair due towards social insurance?

2.2.5 The duty to leave information

All enterprises have to leave information to the authorities on various topics. This duty has often been discussed in terms of it being a heavy burden especially to small enterprises.* Focus in this discussion is mainly on other topics than occupational health and safety. The duty to leave information includes statistics on sick-leave per employee, which is reported to the Social Insurance Office. The employer is obliged to pay a salary during the first two weeks. After that the Social Insurance Office pay compensation based on salary. The employee only reports sick-leave to the employer. Additionally the employer has to report all work-related accidents and diseases to the Social Insurance Office. It has been argued that this has lead to under-reporting of work-related accidents and diseases especially amongst small enterprises.

2.3 Fatalities, injuries, diseases and absence

There are several different information sources that reflect different aspects of the outcome of a poor working environment.

* Different articles and other material on the homepage of Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, www.svensktnaringsliv.se

Primarily, there are the injuries, fatalities and diseases which are accepted as clearly work-related which give the right to compensation for loss of income. Today statistics that relate the outcome of these injuries, fatalities and diseases to the size of the enterprise is not available. It is however possible to use the available statistics to relate the number of fatalities or work-related accidents and diseases, to wage sum for the enterprise (or that part of enterprise with its own insurance number). The wage sum is a reflection of the size of the enterprise. This has never been done.

Secondly, there are the reported injuries, fatalities and diseases, which in some cases are clearly related to the working environment and in some cases less clearly related. These reported injuries, fatalities and diseases are compiled within the ISA-statistics from the Swedish Work Environment Authority and Statistics Sweden. The statistics are based on reports to the Social Insurance Office from individuals (when sick leave exceeds 14 days) and enterprises (for shorter sick-leave). As the basis for these statistics are reports, under- and possibly over reporting will affect the statistics. Such deficiencies in reporting may vary between trades.

Tables 8 to 11 show some statistics for small enterprises of different sizes from the ISA-statistics.

Table 8. Number of fatal accidents during the years 1995 to 1998 broken down by size of establishment (not always equal to size of enterprise) as reported by ISA (Statistics Sweden 1999 and Statistics compiled by ISA, Swedish Work Environment Authority).

	No inform on size	0 empl.	1-9 empl.	10-19 empl.	20-49 empl.	50-199 empl.	> 200 empl.	Total
1995	14	18	18	6	14	12	8	90
1996	15	12	16	7	10	12	15	87
1997	12	17	13	5	15	14	13	89
1998	10	10	19	7	8	12	2	68
Total number 1995-1998	51	57	66	25	47	50	38	334
% of total fatal accidents	15	17	20	7	14	15	11	
% of all employees		15,6	6,7	5,2	5,5	11,7	55,3	

It is notable that enterprises with less than 20 employees have about 44 per cent (probably more, as the size of the enterprise is not known in 15 per cent of the cases) of the fatal accidents but only 27 per cent of the employees. This fact is mainly due to the small group of enterprises with 1-9 employees that have 6,7 per cent of employees but 20 per cent of the accidents. As shown in table 9 most accidents within these enterprises occur within agriculture, construction and transport.

Table 9. Number of fatal accidents during the years 1995–1998 in enterprises with 1-9 employees related to sector as reported by ISA (Statistics Sweden 1999 and Statistics compiled by ISA, Swedish Work Environment Authority).

Trade	Number of fatal accidents 95-98
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and related service activities	15
Construction	12
Land and air transport	10
Manufactured metal production except machinery and equipment	5
Other business activities	5
Sale, maintenance and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	4
Other trades with less than 3 fatal accidents during 1995-1998	17
Total number 1995-1998	66

Table 10. Frequency of accidents per 1000 employees during the years 1996 and 1998 related to size of establishment as reported to ISA (Statistics Sweden 1999 and Statistics compiled by ISA, Swedish Work Environment Authority).

	1-4 empl.	5-49 empl.	> 50 empl.
1996	4,9	8,1	9,8
1998	4,0	8,0	9,5

Table 11. Frequency of work related diseases per 1000 employees during the years 1996 and 1998, related to size of establishment as reported by ISA (Statistics Sweden 1999 and Statistics compiled by ISA, Swedish Work Environment Authority).

	1-4 empl.	5-49 empl.	> 50 empl.
1996	1,9	2,9	3,6
1998	1,7	3,9	5,0

The information in tables 10 and 11 is not easy to understand when compared with the figures for fatal accidents. There seems to be a major underestimate of accidents and diseases within small enterprises, at least if it is presumed that there is some kind of relationship between fatalities and accidents.

There is scarce information about sick leave in general related to size of enterprise. The information available concerns workers (not salaried employees) in the private sector, see table 12.

Table 12. Sick leave in per cent of working time among workers in the private sector, broken down by size. Size relates to establishment (not enterprise) (personal communication with Lennart Jonsson, Swedish Employers Federation, jan 2000).

Year	Size of establishment								
	1-5	6-10	11-25	26-50	51-100	101-200	201-500	501-1000	>1000
1989	8.4	7.6	7.5	9.2	10.9	12.2	12.4	12.8	12.7
1998	5.18	5.62	4.86	5.25	5.73	5.56	6.08	6.56	5.92

In the smallest enterprises absence due to sickness increased markedly between 1997 and 1998. This is supposed to be connected to the reduction in the time for which the employer has to pay a salary, which was changed from four weeks to two weeks on April 1 1998 (personal communication with Lennart Jonsson, Swedish Employers Federation, Jan 2000).

2.4 Cost of injuries, ill-health and absence

The costs of injuries, ill-health and absence are related to the incidence of work-related accidents and diseases as well as to illnesses in general which are not due to work. In the Swedish statistics it is hardly possible to evaluate which parts of these costs are work-related. During the last year a project has started aimed at developing methods for such economic evaluations, based on a preliminary study (Vinberg & Malmquist 1998).

There is an insurance within the private sector, which covers loss of income exceeding what is paid for by the Social Insurance Office, for work-related accidents and diseases. The insurance is administered by AMF Insurance (AMF Försäkring). Information on the total cost per year to cover loss of income is not available (confidential data). No information is available on costs for enterprises broken down by size (wage sum per insurance number, which often is equivalent to wage sum per enterprise).

In one programme, projects were initiated in enterprises and partly supported by the Working Life Fund. All enterprises receiving grants for specific projects had to write a report about the results in their projects. In their reports economic calculations of the economic effects on the enterprises had to be included. These calculations were based on a method presented by the Fund and included calculating the costs for sick leave. However, when sick leave before and after the projects was compared, sick leave at the peak of good national economy (end of 1980s) was compared to sick leave during a deep recession (beginning and middle of 1990s). Thus the effects of the projects were difficult to evaluate independently of the effects from changes in the national economy and labour market.

2.5 Other measures of health and safety

Statistics Sweden regularly measures different factors relating to working life through enquiries. Three different kinds of enquiries are made regularly.

AKU-surveys are made every month and are sent to approximately 17 000 persons covering different aspects of employment, work, absence from work and unemployment.

Working environment surveys are made every other year and were last published for 1997. They are directed towards some of the people within the AKU-study. This survey covers the physical and psycho-social aspects of working life.

Work-related pain and difficulties are surveyed once a year. This survey is included in the AKU-study.

None of the results of these studies have thus far been related to size of enterprise. However, this question has been discussed and it seems to be possible to relate the results to size, by using other databases in connection with these surveys. There are discussions going on regarding this, but no decisions have yet been taken.

The Swedish Trade Union Confederation makes surveys regularly regarding the working environment. In their surveys among safety representatives and employees in different sectors, the number of employees is surveyed as well. This means there is information available that could be used to study different aspects of the

working environment in relation to size of enterprise. Thus far, however, the surveys have not been used to investigate this aspect (LO 1996a, b, 1997).

2.6 Small enterprises opinions about their health and safety

In two Swedish studies, employers and employees in small enterprises have been asked what they think about their own working environment. Not surprisingly, the majority of small Swedish enterprises find their own working environment better than average in their trade. In a study from 1989, ten of 22 employers found their own working environment better than average in their trade, ten thought it was about average and two did not know. The safety delegates opinions were a bit different but the tendency was similar. Five thought the working environment was better, two about average, two worse and six did not have an opinion (Antonsson et al. 1989). Thus, both employers and safety delegates seem to overestimate their own working environment, even though many safety delegates in small enterprises have not got an opinion, probably due to lack of experience from other enterprises. In a study from 1998, 22 of 30 employers found their own working environment better than average in their trade and six about average. One did not know and one thought the physical working environment was worse than in large enterprises in the same trade but that the psycho-social working environment was better (Antonsson et al. 1998).

2.7 Health and safety information and training in small enterprises

In general, information and training is not solely directed towards only large or small enterprises, but rather towards enterprises in sectors. It is difficult to get hold of data that describe small enterprise participation in information and education activities. However, it is not too much to say that small enterprises are under-represented in such activities in relation to their share of the employees.

2.8 Information sources used by small enterprises

Employers have several different sources for their information regarding the working environment, the most important ones are:

- Regional Safety Representatives, who might visit the enterprise once a year or once every two years.
- Occupational health services, if the enterprise is attached to one.
- Newspapers published by an employers' organisation and sectoral organisations.
- Employers' organisations, where there usually is at least one person responsible for working environment issues and serving as an adviser to member enterprises.
- Business network with colleagues in the same sector, neighbours and other business contacts.

- Suppliers as customers from which small enterprises purchase whatever is needed for their production. Products are sometimes marketed as better to work with and better for the working environment.

Depending on trade and enterprise, the importance of these information sources will vary.

Employees in small enterprises get most of their information through a few channels:

- The trade union's regular newspaper, which is often published monthly.
- The regional safety representative, when they visit the enterprise.
- Daily newspapers.
- Occupational health services, if the enterprise is attached to one.

The different channels are all sustainable in the sense that they exist over a long period of time and can be used for providing information to small enterprises. For some of these channels, the working environment is in focus, for others a topic they may touch on occasionally. Taken together these channels provide a good basis for sustainable interventions. How successful these will be depends on how much time there is available to work with small enterprises.

To obtain sustainable interventions, the mere existence of a channel is not enough. The result will probably, to quite a large extent, depend on the means and methods, which are used to intervene in enterprises. As this is a complex process depending on many different factors, it will not be discussed further in this context. Additionally, there is a scarcity of research on this topic within Sweden.

3. Strategies on health and safety in small enterprises

3.1 Public strategies

Different actors have different ways of dealing with small enterprises and their working environment. From a national perspective, the main actors are:

- The government and especially the Ministry of Labour (currently included in the Ministry of Industry, Employment and Communications).
- The parties on the labour market, employers and employees organisations.
- The agencies, mainly the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the regional Work Environment Inspectorate.
- The occupational health services.

These main actors have started several programs and activities with a focus on small enterprises or programs that are especially important to small enterprises, even if they may cover large enterprises as well. Such programs are:

- Arbetslivsfonden, ALF, (the Work Life Fund) was built up from a so called working environment fee, which was paid as an extra tax on the wage sum by all employers between September 1989 and December 1990. ALF existed for some years and initiated and financed improvements in the working environment in many enterprises, not only small ones. (Not to be confused with the Swedish Council for Work Life Research, which mainly finances research and development.) Many small enterprises got financial support from ALF to improve their organisation of work as well as the physical working environment.

The Swedish Work Environment Authority will give priority to small enterprises during the year 2000. During recent years there has been a focus on systematic work environment management in small enterprises. Inspections have been directed towards specific sectors containing many small enterprises with high risks.

For the years to come, the Board has the following plans concerning small enterprises:

“Small enterprises especially within mechanical workshops and the transport and building sectors, shall improve their awareness of risks, their knowledge of the regulations concerning the working environment and increase and improve their precautionary work.

Tangible goals are

- The Work Environment Inspectorate shall focus their inspections on small enterprises in the sectors mentioned above and control risk awareness, knowledge and precautionary work.
- The Swedish Work Environment Authority shall develop methods for information that motivates enterprises within the sectors mentioned above to

increase their knowledge about the regulations that concern their working environment.”

Below, the various strategies above are further described and evaluated. Two successful initiatives, the regional safety representatives and the programme Growth Potential Objective 4 are described in more detail in paragraph 3.

3.2 The social partners strategies

The basic strategies of employers’ and employees’ organisations are to co-operate with each other regarding health and safety, even if one-party activities also occur. The social partners have mainly co-operated on OHS issues since their general agreement of 1938 (the Saltsjobaden agreement, in which the employers recognised the unions and accepted to negotiate with them while the unions accepted the employers’ right to fully manage the workplaces). This co-operation has been especially noted on OHS issues. However, behind this, there has been a basic tension between the partners in that the employers federation, SAF, emphasises voluntary means while the unions, mainly in the blue collar federation of LO, are more open to use regulation and other mandatory means to make all employers live up to OHS minimum standards (Frick 2001).

When it comes to the physical working environment, in general there are no large differences in opinion between employers’ and employees’ organisations. The opinions are more divergent when it comes to psycho-social aspects e.g. the organisation of work. The common values are reflected in collective agreements concerning the working environment. In the agreement for the trade and service sectors* the following common values are stated.

- A good working environment is of common interest to the parties.
- Sound and safe workplaces create better working conditions for the employees and reduce sick leave and thus improve productivity and quality.
- The work regarding the working environment is a part of the ordinary work in enterprises and should be integrated in the line organisation.
- Questions regarding the working environment are handled in co-operation with employees and their local union representatives.
- The preventive work regarding the working environment concerns both the physical and psycho-social aspects of the working environment.

Even though this is only an agreement for one sector, the values are probably valid for most other sectors as well. The co-operation has however decreased from 1993 onwards when the Swedish Employers Federation terminated the collective agreement regarding the working environment between the central parties. Today there are agreements on working environment for some (but not the majority of) sectors. Additionally there are agreements on Occupational Health Services for

* Arbetsmiljöavtal för det gemensamma kollektivavtalsområdet samt allmänna råd för det lokala arbetsmiljöarbetet. Giltigt från 1995-06-13. Avtal mellan Handelns arbetsgivarorganisation, Handelsanställdas förbund och Handelstjänstemannaförbundet.

several sectors. Even if there are no specific agreements regarding the working environment, many parties still co-operate regarding working environment issues.

When it comes to the agreements mentioned above, they are general and cover all enterprises irrespective of size. The employers' and employees' organisations are well aware of the problems with small enterprises, but the problem is mainly dealt with in specific projects directed towards small enterprises. The employees' organisations work through the Regional Safety Representatives. The Swedish Employers Federation, SAF, instead has central working environment experts and a local organisation that can provide some assistance to enterprises on request. From time to time, SAF criticises the system of Regional Safety Representatives.

4. The main actors and evaluation of their activities

4.1 The Swedish Work Environment Authority and the Work Environment Inspectorate

4.1.1 The Work Environment Inspectorate

Work environment inspectors have the function of inspecting small establishments. Another function they have is to give support and advice. This support is limited, due to a lack of resources and the fact that the inspections carry a higher priority. All enterprises have the option to contact the Work Environment Inspectorate in order to ask specific questions. An evaluation from 1995 (Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen 1995) shows that small enterprises are not very active in using this option. 47 per cent of small enterprises (1-19 employees) had never posed a question to the Work Environment Inspectorate. Larger enterprises use this option more frequently. Only 18 per cent had never contacted the Work Environment Inspectorate to ask about something.

The Work Environment Inspectorate is divided into ten districts. They inspect the working environment and the systematic work environment management in both the private and the public sector, including small enterprises. In 1994 about 15 000 of 160 000 private and independent enterprises with 1-9 employees were visited (Johansson 1995). Detailed figures for 1997 (the last available year) is presented in table 7.* As can be seen from table 7, more than 75 per cent of all visits are made at small establishments. Still, the largest establishments are visited almost three times a year, while the smallest ones are visited about once every ten years. It ought to be observed that table 7 is based on statistics from the Swedish Work Environment Authority and the number of establishments broken down by size differ from the official Swedish statistics.

The inspections are directed towards enterprises and activities where there are signs that problems are at hand. Five different grounds for inspection are used. Inspections are made:

- In *sectors* which show high risks according to the Swedish statistics on work-related injuries and diseases, e.g. the construction and the wood industry.
- In *enterprises* which in some way show high risks in the statistical information on establishments and their work-related accidents and diseases.
- In enterprises with reported *accidents*. Severe accidents are a priority.
- In sectors with *recently identified risks*.
- In enterprises where *someone*, e.g. the safety representative, *requires* an inspection.

* Statistics compiled by Lasse Holmlund, Swedish Work Environment Authority, Solna, Sweden. Statistics is not published. Personal communication.

Table 7. The Work Environment Inspectorate visits and inspection notifications to establishments broken down by size (an enterprise may have activities at one or several establishments). Numbers from 1997, covering all the Inspectorate's districts. The establishments with 0 employees may have false information on the number of employees (Statistics compiled by Lasse Holmlund, Swedish Work Environment Authority, Solna, Sweden. Statistics is not published. Personal communication).

	Number of employees								Total
	0	1-4	5-9	10-19	20-49	50-199	200-499	500-	
Number of visits	3 695	8 675	6 325	5 990	5 969	5 660	1 636	1 633	39 583
Per cent of all visits	9	22	16	15	15	14	4	4	
Number of visits per 100 establishments	11	7	13	18	27	54	114	276	14
Inspection notifications given after inspections	1 347	4 208	3 623	3 451	3 453	3 038	833	794	20 747
Number of inspection notifications per 100 establishments	36	49	57	58	58	54	51	49	52
Number of establishments	32 532	128 511	48 355	32 840	21 948	10 540	1 432	592	276 750

ISA, the Swedish statistics on reported work-related accidents and diseases, and the local ISA, LISA (which includes statistics for enterprises), are important tools in the selection of trades and enterprises to be focussed on by the inspections. Trades with high incidences of work-related accidents and diseases are prioritised. Thus, for example, joineries and mechanical workshops are inspected quite often, even if they have few employees. Other small enterprises are rarely or never inspected, as they have few work-related accidents and diseases. As an example, statistics from 1998* show that 51 per cent of enterprises constructing buildings, 29 of forestry enterprises and 34 of enterprises in the wood products industry were visited compared to only two per cent of enterprises in real estate, renting and business activities and five of enterprises in the retail trade.

Inspections are also directed towards such activities that have started to show signs of work-related accidents and diseases. Thus the Work Environment Inspectorate has had a campaign directed towards dentists and the handling of new acrylate-based materials for teeth filling, where many small dentistry enterprises have been visited.

4.1.2 Evaluations of the Work Environment Inspectorate

Evaluations mainly focus on activities, not on effects of activities, see table 7 for inspections and inspection notifications in relation to the size of the establishment. Effects are difficult to measure and it is even more difficult to relate an effect, for example a reduced number of accidents, to a specific activity performed by the Work Environment Inspectorate.

The present strategies are perceived as good, even though development of them is still needed. That applies especially to the small enterprise sector, which is known to be difficult to work with and achieve good results.

An evaluation made in 1995 of the experiences of and attitudes towards the work environment inspectors in enterprises of different sizes showed, for example, that:

- 28 per cent of small (1-19 employees) had got suggestions for working environment improvements from the Work Environment Inspectorate. 56 per cent of larger enterprises had got such suggestions.
- 20 per cent had at any time got suggestions from the Work Environment Inspectorate on how to work well with their working environment. The figure for larger enterprises is in this case 46 per cent.
- 33 per cent of small enterprises have little or next to no knowledge about laws and regulations compared to 17 per cent of the larger enterprises.
- 47 per cent of the smaller enterprises have never contacted the Work Environment Inspectorate compared to 18 % of the larger ones.

This indicates that small enterprises both ask for and get less support from the Work Environment Inspectorate than larger enterprises.

* Statistics compiled by Lasse Holmlund, Swedish Work Environment Authority, Solna, Sweden. Statistics is not published. Personal communication.

4.1.3 Enforcement actions from authorities

There is no study of enforcement actions in relation to size of enterprise apart from the information on inspection notifications, which is accounted for in table 7 above. It seems inspection notifications are given less often in the smallest enterprises than in the largest ones. Calculating inspection notifications per employee will give quite another picture where the smallest establishments are getting more notifications per employee than the largest ones.

4.1.4 Systematic work environment management

Even though systematic work environment management, SWEM, (see section 2.2.2) is also compulsory for small enterprises including shareholder's enterprises without employees, about 70 per cent of all inspected small enterprises had no SWEM. This is a question of great concern to the agency and various kinds of activities have been initiated. For example a research programme is carried out by the National Institute for Working Life in co-operation with the Swedish Environmental Research Institute and the Swedish Work Environment Authority. Several projects have been carried out by the Work Environment Inspectorate in a number of regions.

4.2 Occupational Health Services

4.2.1 Affiliation to Occupational Health Services

Most employees in small firms do not have access to OHS. The lowest levels of access to enterprise health care are found in the private sector, in commercial activities, farming and forestry (Statskontoret 1997).

The current OHS coverage of the labour market is approximately 70 per cent, but only about 10-20 per cent of the total number of enterprises.

Enterprise statistics gathered by Statistics Sweden (SCB) and the register set up by the Work Environment Inspectorate of enterprises affiliated to occupational health service units in the County of Örebro in 1990 were linked and matched. It emerged that the level of affiliation among small enterprises (< 20 employees or no employees) did not even reach 10 per cent. The corresponding figure for enterprises with 20 to 49 employees was 48 per cent (Bronberger-Dankvardt & Karlsson 1994).

These results can be compared with those of a study conducted in the County of Stockholm during the period 1993 to 1994, according to which 44 per cent of the enterprises with fewer than 50 employees had concluded agreements with Occupational Health Service units. Enterprises with no employees were not included and this explains the difference to some degree (Nise et al. 1995).

If employees are asked if they have access to Occupational Health Services, the percentage is higher (table 8). Employees in small companies probably believe "every doctor they are advised to by their company" as OHS (Bostedt 1992).

Table 8. OHS-coverage related to company-size (1995) according to the employees stating that they have access to OHS

Company size	OHS coverage (%)
0-4	36
5-9	58
10-19	74
20-49	81

To sum up, it is clear that affiliation rates are very low, especially in micro-businesses (<10 employee). About a quarter of all employees within the private sector work in enterprises of this kind. Millions of Swedish Kronor have been invested in different projects to increase the number of small enterprises affiliated to the Occupational Health Services. However, neither state subsidies nor any other kind of incentive have had any effect. The number of small enterprises requesting affiliation has still not changed.

4.2.2 The development of OHS

Occupational Health Services in Sweden have long traditions. Industrial physicians worked in Swedish industry as long as a hundred years ago and in some cases even longer back in history, to guarantee the general medical care of the workers. In the 1940s, occupational health activities were gradually added to the work of industrial physicians, whose duties comprised pre-employment examinations, regular health examinations and the supervision of health conditions at work. In the same way, safety engineers dealing with the prevention of accidents and occupational diseases have a long history in Swedish working life. Physicians and engineers started to co-operate increasingly. New staff categories, such as nurses, ergonomists and behavioural scientists, joined the team. Voluntary OHS based on an agreement between employers' and workers' organisations were set up in almost every municipality and also in certain sectors, such as farming, the building and construction industry, transportation and OHS for shop employees.

4.2.3 Financing of OHS

From 1986, grants were paid to the enterprises in relation to the number of people covered by Occupational Health Services. A basic grant was paid for every employee – entrepreneurs and self-employed people included – covered by OHS and working an average of at least 15 hours per week. A small business increment was also paid for up to 50 people in each affiliated enterprise, regardless of the size of the enterprise. In this way, small enterprises received more money per employee than large ones.

In the early 1990s, when OHS experienced their “golden age”, the coverage was assessed at 75-80 per cent of the work force. OHS were the most important external resource at work when it came to the prevention of occupationally related problems. They were mainly concerned with medical, technical and psycho-social means of prevention and rehabilitation.

In 1992, state subsidies for Occupational Health Services were withdrawn. This resulted in the reduction of the number of units and of professional staff (a 25-30

per cent staff reduction). The number of employees with access to OHS fell from 80 to around 70 per cent and the services are now totally dependent on the commercial market. In most cases, OHS staffs have to charge for every service they supply to an enterprise.

4.2.4 Extent of OHS

The Swedish Occupational Health Services currently consist of about 700 units, which are run by around 350 chief executives and are organised in various legal forms, in principle with at least one unit in every municipality. Still the most common operational form is for a local group of customers to own a limited enterprise via an association. This sector employs some 7 000 people, most of whom have medical, technical or behavioural science skills and expertise.

By tradition, there have been three different types of OHS: (a) units integrated within an enterprise, (b) joint Occupational Health Centres and (c) sectoral services. The integrated units provide medical and technical services, mainly to large enterprises. The Occupational Health Centres offer services to member enterprises and firms of different sizes. The sectoral services usually cover agriculture, forestry and the construction industry, but they currently only exist on a limited scale.

The orientation of these operations varies significantly. A number of OHS units sell "individual services". They have differentiated fees for their various services and employers can purchase them as the need arises (a fee per service arrangement). The costs charged by the OHS can be deducted for tax purposes by the employer.

Guidelines for the quality assurance of Occupational Health Services according to ISO 9000 have been produced and implemented by some 20 OHS. Ethical guidelines have also been drawn up for OHS, based on the Code of Ethics held by the ICOH.

4.2.5 Service provided by OHS

The main skills and expertise of the OHS staff focus on the assessment of working ability and descriptions of the relationship between working environment, organisation, productivity and health.

The traditional role of the OHS is to provide assistance for both the management and the employees so that the employees are not injured in the course of their work. To perform this role, the service must both be and also be perceived to be objective and impartial. However, Swedish market-adapted OHS do not always function in this way. It is generally the employer who is the client and he assesses the enterprise's needs when it comes to OHS.

It is a well-known fact that small enterprises generally feel that they are most in need of general health care services. "Immediate help when we become ill so that we can return to production as quickly as possible" – a quote from a small enterprise owner. They say that emergency support from doctors, nurses and physiotherapists is most important (Grindestam 1992). At the same time, surveys indicate that enterprises do not have the necessary knowledge of what OHS can offer in addition to health care (Bostedt 1992).

4.2.6 Evaluation of OHS

To obtain some idea of how well the pictures presented above match the current situation, a questionnaire was sent to 64 OHS units in central Sweden in November 1997 (Bornberger-Dankvardt 1997). It was addressed to the managing director. The questions related to the affiliation of small enterprises, and changes were assessed by comparison with the situation five years earlier with regard to ordering of OHS-services. Half of the questionnaires were answered.

The results reveal that 62 per cent of the OHS customer enterprises are enterprises with fewer than 20 employees. Although they account for a large percentage of the affiliated enterprises, they usually account for a small percentage of the individuals who are registered. The exceptions are OHS which focus on typically small-enterprise based sectors, such as trade and farming.

The number of OHS units which reported an increase in the number of affiliated small enterprises was somewhat higher than the number reporting a decrease.

The services that small enterprises requested from OHS have been ranked as follows, on the basis of the answers to the questionnaire (ibid.):

1. Health care.
2. Work-related health care.
3. Advice.
4. Rehabilitation/work adaptation.
5. Health promotion.
6. Systematic work environment management (Management system).
7. Miscellaneous.

This matches up very well with the results of previous studies, which reveal that small enterprises are primarily interested in health care.

When asked "Does the range of services offered by the OHS match up with what small enterprises request?" 90 per cent of the OHS answered *yes*. Those that answered *no* stated that enterprises wanted more health check-ups and faster assistance (ibid.).

The following question was also asked, "Do you think that small enterprises purchase the correct services based on the needs you see that they have?" About one in every four OHS (28 per cent) felt that enterprises purchased the right services. Most of the OHS that answered YES had a strong medical profile.

So there is a "gap" between what the OHS feel that small enterprises need and the needs the small enterprises actually feel that they have. This can be a source of frustration for staff at OHS. Previous studies have shown that the main reason why small enterprises join OHS is that their employees want them to. The staff feels that they need health check-ups and health care first and foremost.

When asked "Which other services do you feel small enterprises have?" the OHS answered: working environment development, Systematic work environment management, organisational and relationship issues, training, advice, health promotion.

Some 82 per cent of the OHS also felt that there is enormous difficulty when it comes to persuading small enterprises to buy more of the services the OHS feel

they need. They felt that poor economy, lack of time and lack of interest could be contributory factors.

Previous studies have found that enterprises have very little knowledge of the services that OHS can offer (Bostedt 1992).

The following question was also asked, "Are small enterprises profitable as customers?". Only 17 per cent of the OHS units answered *yes* to this question.

The OHS feel that it is difficult to charge the full price and that a great deal of work has to be done before contact is made and a response is forthcoming. The break-even point for achieving profitability from these services to small enterprises appears to be an enterprise with around ten employees.

When asked "How do you deal with the problem of profitability?" the OHS answered: higher charges, training in larger groups, joint activities, networks, simple basic service, but otherwise sub-orders. It is easier to ask for payment for solving problems, according to one person.

It costs the OHS a great deal to persuade small enterprises to join, if it is not possible to find ways of streamlining the services that are offered to small enterprises. At the same time, small enterprise owners are prepared to pay more if they feel the charge is justified.

Finally, we asked, "Do you think some form of support, financial or in terms of expertise, is needed to enable OHS to approach working environment issues in small enterprises on a more long-term basis?" – 84 per cent answered *yes* to this question.

When asked, "What do you think the problem is at present?" the OHS answered: limited economic resources, anything that is not requested is put at the bottom of the list, production is the be-all and end-all, there is no time for or interest in dealing with working environment issues, lack of expertise, lack of information to small enterprises about the advantages of OHS, some inertia within the OHS when it comes to complying with the demands of small enterprise owners, enterprise/trade-union organisations have still not understood the need for OHS, poor knowledge of the benefits of a good working environment, unfair competition.

The results of the questionnaire study reveal that OHS feel that the range of services matches up very well with what small enterprises request. At the same time, the OHS recognise other needs which enterprises have not identified, needs that are difficult to communicate in such a way that small enterprises also recognise them as needs. A balance must always be found so that enterprises do not regard the OHS as problem-seekers and an extension of the authorities. At the same time, it is difficult for the OHS to be regarded as development consultants. There is a lack of clarity in their role, which is difficult to reconcile in its various aspects, and difficult to communicate to people who are inexperienced when it comes to ordering services.

4.2.7 Small enterprises' opinions on OHS

Small enterprises usually have a very simple organisational structure with only two levels, the owner/manager and the employees. This has both advantages and disadvantages. However, the success of an enterprise depends very much on the skills of a single person, the owner/manager. An enlightened small enterprise

owner prioritises the working environment, but he/she still needs to understand the way this work should be carried out.

A questionnaire study aimed at all the enterprise owners in the Municipality of Askersund (1994) revealed that more than half of these enterprise owners felt that they were actively involved in various issues relating to the working environment. About 18 per cent utilised the OHS and 11 per cent were members of the OHS in the area (Högberg & Arvidsson 1994).

In a questionnaire study aimed at small manufacturing enterprises, 46 per cent said that working environment issues are an active part of their daily work; 41 per cent had utilised the OHS during the past three years (Bornberger-Dankvardt & Fredriksson 1997). Health check-ups (94 per cent), rehabilitation issues (65 per cent), technical/ergonomic analyses (65 per cent), health care/accidents (59 per cent) were identified as the services that were most frequently used. Only five per cent requested an extension of the range of OHS or some other changes to these services.

In an in-depth interview with twelve small enterprise owners in Västmanland, four of the enterprises stated that they were affiliated to the OHS. Another enterprise had terminated its membership "because it cost more than it was worth". Only one of the member enterprises thought that it really benefited from OHS with health check-ups, access to physiotherapists and doctors, support for training activities and help when assessing the working environment. All the other enterprise owners were sceptical about OHS to varying degrees. The author points out that there appears to be a confidence gap which is very largely historical and dates back to the period in which small enterprises "were forced to do things that were not important for us". The OHS is still very frequently stamped as "the authorities" and this arouses a strong sense of antipathy among certain enterprise owners (Modig 1998).

To conclude, small businesses are very sensitive to sick leave and therefore put rapid access to health care high on their list of priorities. The OHS staff thinks that SSE should focus more heavily on preventive services. At the same time, these enterprises are not aware of what the Occupational Health Service units can offer in addition to medical care.

A holistic approach is preferable. The small enterprise owner does not feel that he has working environment problems, he has problems to solve and the working environment could be one aspect to take into account when solving these problems. The role of the OHS as a consultant on matters apart from health care is not clear. Small enterprise owners often believe that the OHS do not have these over-all skills and expertise.

In order to see things from the small enterprise owner's perspective, the consultant has to see the big picture, the total working and living situation. It is the individual small enterprise owner's unique situation, attitudes and way of regarding the business of running a enterprise that should govern the services the OHS offer (Hildeland 1992). It is a question of getting the customer to feel very strongly that his/her actual situation is being taken into account.

The small enterprise owner must be met at his/her individual development stage, figure 2. This figure shows a modified Maslows model, where enterprise

needs regarding health and safety may be very basic and result in the use only of emergency measures. More developed enterprises use more developed OH Services and the most developed enterprises can use OH Services as part of business development. The model is general, though small enterprises are more likely to use basic services and larger enterprises more developed services.

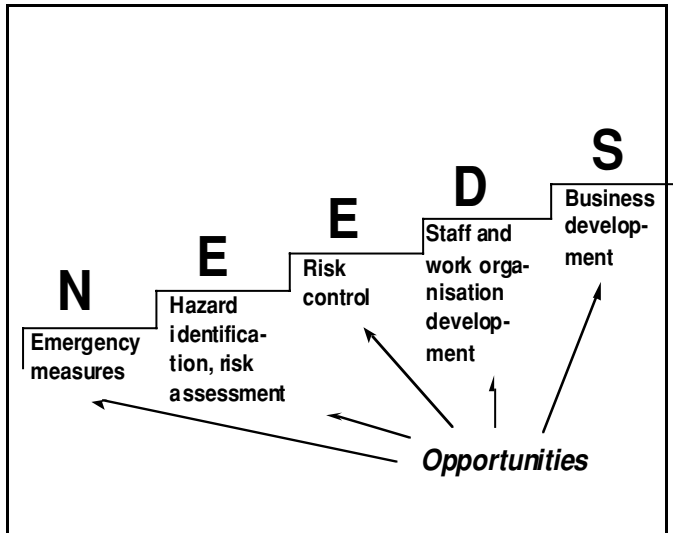


Figure 2. A modified Maslow model showing the possible need for Occupational Health Services among small enterprises.

4.2.8 The Örebro model – support to OHS from an SSE Unit

At the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine in Örebro, there is an SSE- unit specialising in occupational health and safety research and development in Small Scale Enterprises. Its main tasks are:

- Occupational health and safety research and development in SSEs.
- Information about the prevention of occupational illnesses and injuries in SSEs.
- Education and training in SSEs.

The approach is multidisciplinary and pragmatic, with a “down-to-earth” orientation; Working environment surveys (including different measures), health check-ups, information and training are some of the activities undertaken by the unit to promote a good working environment and health for people at work. The relationship between illnesses and different factors in the working environment is a matter of great concern. Working environment problems are focused on in various intervention projects, encouraging active participation from both employees and employers.

Health check-ups and working environment surveys are usually carried out sector by sector. Knowledge relating to health hazards and working environment conditions in different sectors is presented to the enterprises and to the Occupational Health Services units, the Work Environment Inspectorate, Regional Safety Representatives and other people responsible for working environment issues. More than 60 projects have been conducted since the unit was established in 1980.

Most of them have focused on occupational health and safety in enterprises with fewer than ten employees.

One experience at the SSE-unit is that when meeting employers in small enterprises in their capacity as professional consultants on working environmental issues, they must not limit themselves to discussing only matters relating to the working environment. They must also be open to discussions on the whole range of problems they experience. The staff at the Occupational Health Service Units must be experienced in more areas than those covered by traditional education and have access to effective networks offering the services of other consultants whenever necessary. The new global view of working environmental issues must also take account of areas like the organisation of work, the development of professional skills, productivity and quality.

In various projects, the SSE unit in Örebro has tested different methods such as publicity and articles published in several trade journals on the advantage of Occupational Health Services. The effect of free affiliation to Occupational Health Services units has been evaluated, alongside advisory services for small enterprises and massive information campaigns. However, the conclusion was drawn that most efforts have been a waste of time and resources. The only viable method is to visit the managers of small enterprises, thereby gradually creating a feeling of confidence, and to sell only one service at a time. In general all those involved in Occupational Health Services issues are guilty of one cardinal error and that is to proudly present the entire range of services offered. Most of it is incomprehensible to managers and simply viewing the menu puts them off.

To be successful in the capacity as a consultant for small enterprises, one has to be able to create, as has already been mentioned above, a feeling of confidence. This can only be achieved if one is aware of and understands what clients from small enterprises expect. To establish a good relationship, one must speak the same language.

In a project, two representatives from each Occupational Health Service Centre in the County of Örebro attended a training course paid for by the project.

The aim was to train them to become experts on small enterprises. The training included the following subjects:

- Networks established by small enterprises.
- Current working conditions within small enterprises.
- Occupational Health Service Units becoming service-minded.
- Working environment and economy.
- Marketing.
- Development of information material.
- Visits to workplaces and interviews with managers.

The outcome of the course was evaluated two years later, see figure 3. All the participants confirmed that it had had a positive effect on their daily work; 79 per cent stated that they felt more secure when contacting small enterprises. One-third are more involved in this type of work than before they attended the course (Bornberger-Dankvart & Karlsson 1994). The staff at the Occupational Health Service

Units experienced a special need to improve their arguments when holding discussions with micro-businesses.

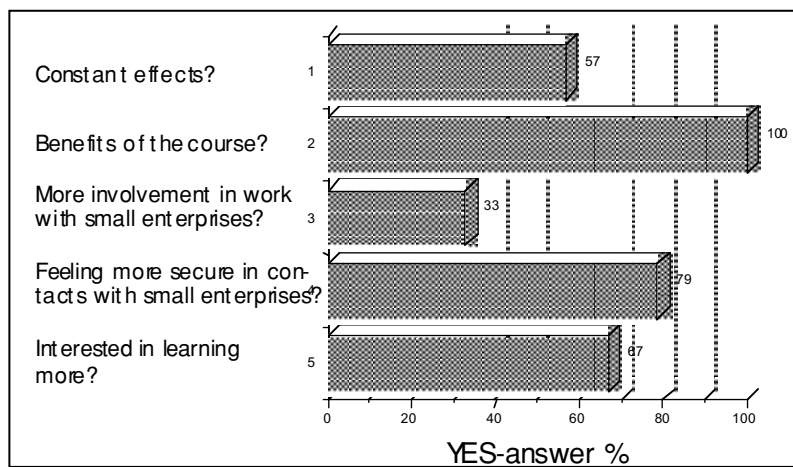


Figure 3. Questionnaire conducted among 21 OHS-employees who have been trained as experts on small enterprises. The figure compiles the results of 16 answers of the questionnaire.

In a study conducted at the national level (Ds 1998:17), the OHS as a resource in society has been analysed. It has been established that the OHS must focus on working as a partner and a creator of ideas, a partner to whom small enterprises can turn with confidence when they wish to develop their operations, with the working environment and rehabilitation as a starting point. Moreover, the OHS must make it easier for small enterprise owners to establish networks and be prepared to modify their information and their way of working in order to adapt more successfully to small enterprises.

4.3 The Swedish Worklife Fund, ALF

4.3.1 The Work Life Fund, 1990-1995

Arbetslivsfonden, ALF, (the Work Life Fund) existed between 1990 and 1995 and initiated and financed programmes for improvements in the working environment in many enterprises, not only small ones. (Not to be confused with the Swedish Council for Work Life Research, which mainly finances research and development.) Many small enterprises got financial support from ALF to improve their organisation of work as well as the physical working environment (Alpenberg & Karlsson 1995, Gustavsen et al. 1996).

More than 23 100 programmes in about as many enterprises were supported by the Fund. The total cost for these programmes was 9 650 MSEK (more than one billion ECU). The Fund also financed participation in short courses regarding working environment through “education checks” for a total of 300 MSEK. 51 per cent of the grants concerned the organisation of work. The physical working environment got 23 per cent and rehabilitation 17 per cent of the grants (Alpenberg & Karlsson 1995).

Private enterprises with 1-49 employees got 18 per cent of the grants but produced 58 per cent of the programmes that were funded (ibid.).

4.3.2 Evaluation of the Fund

A general evaluation of the Fund has been published, which focuses on the Fund as an initiator of change in working life. This evaluation, however, does not consider differences in enterprises, but rather discuss change processes in more general terms. Even though many of the conclusions and discourses may be valid also for small enterprises, they will not be discussed here (Gustavsen et al. 1996). An evaluation with a focus on the effects on small enterprises arising from the support given by the ALF to enterprises with less than 50 employees has been made. Some of the conclusions from the evaluation are (Alpenberg & Karlsson 1995):

- The support has had a considerable push-effect especially on enterprise inclination to act and change with a focus on projects related to the working environment.
- Such projects have been more extensive and carried out earlier than planned.
- The support might have been a bit distorted and in favour of some enterprises at the expense of others.
- In the projects, the “soft parts” regarding the organisation of work have grown in importance compared to the original ideas in the enterprises, partly due to the influence from the ALF.
- The most frequently occurring activities have been directed towards investments in order to solve concrete and experienced problems relating to strain injuries and monotonous work.
- Changes relating to the organisation of work have been more frequent in the ALF-projects than in other non-ALF-financed projects. The results have often been a more open work climate at the workplace, increased motivation and improved productivity / efficiency.
- The awareness of working environment and its importance has increased as a result of the ALF-projects, not least regarding the relation between working environment and economy.
- The purpose of the ALF-projects often had nuances. This reflects the holistic view of business held by small enterprise managers and owners.
- Improving profit and efficiency were very important motives in the small enterprises for conducting the projects, apart from the motives concerning the working environment. This was interpreted as an aim to make enterprises’ activities more functional from a holistic perspective.
- It was difficult to quantify the economic effects of the ALF-projects and the estimates made were often pure guesswork, based on models from ALF.
- The ALF-projects have reduced the illness-rate, but the greatest reduction of this rate relates to other external and internal factors such as reduction in staff, recession and changed legislation.

Even though the effects from this programme have been evaluated, the evaluation has focussed on the target group, the enterprises. There is scarce information on

intermediaries, who they were, their work and role in the programme. To summarise, intermediaries in this programme were many different kinds of actors. In general, small enterprises got help from some kind of consultant who wrote the application for funding for enterprise specific projects. In the process of developing the application, there seem to have been a lot of discussions with intermediaries as well as with people from the Fund. These discussions often resulted in adapting the original ideas to meet the intentions of the Fund. Thus changes in the organisation of work as well as evaluation of economic effects were included in many programmes.

The intermediaries were, to quite a large extent, occupational health service personnel. Additionally many consultants served as intermediaries. The business idea for many consultants was to help out with the application, often without costs for the enterprises. When the decision to fund the project was taken, the consultants continued to work as paid consultants within the project.

When calculating how much money was required for each project, the internal costs in enterprises as well as the costs of consultants were included, often along with costs for various kinds of investment. The Fund covered parts of but not the entire budget for the projects. In this way, enterprises got the external costs covered by the projects and paid for the internal costs themselves.

The way of calculating costs put emphasis on the enterprises' own activities within the project, as did the prioritisation of activities relating to the organisation of work

4.4 Prevent

There is another main actor apart from those mentioned above, that is important to small enterprises: Prevent, formerly the Joint Industrial Safety Council. Prevent is owned by employer's and employee's organisations in the private sector. Prevent publishes books, brochures and study materials. They also have several projects, which often aim at improving the working environment in a target group of enterprises. One of the projects, Meeting Point Sormland, is further described below. Prevent also arranges courses, seminars and other activities.

One of the major impacts that Prevent has on small enterprises is through the working materials they publish, which in many cases are aimed especially at small enterprises. These materials may be purchased directly by small enterprises or by intermediaries who use the materials as a support in their contacts with small enterprises. Examples of such materials are:

- About 25 checklists for different trades. The checklists are developed to help small enterprises survey their own working environment and find control measures that improve the working environment.
- Working materials on systematic work environment management, especially developed to suit small enterprises.
- Information and working materials developed for specific trades with many small enterprises, e.g. carpentry, hairdressers and the transport business.

Intermediaries such as occupational health services and work environment inspectors use these materials. For some specific topics, the Swedish Work Environment Authority recommend enterprises, even small ones, to use specific materials.

Prevent arranges lectures, breakfast meetings, seminars and courses. Of course some small enterprises take part in these arrangements but as a whole, small enterprises seem to be under-represented if viewed in relation to the number of employees in these enterprises.

5. Experiences from two successful health and safety initiatives in small enterprises

5.1 An overview of different approaches

There are three major approaches that use intermediaries as an essential part of their strategy to improve the working environment in small enterprises. These three approaches are:

- A. The development and use of professionals that focus on small enterprises in their work, e.g. Regional Safety Representatives (even if they are representatives of the trade unions, they also may have quite a good practical knowledge on problems and solutions), occupational health services, work environment inspectors. There have been several attempts to use other groups as a support to small enterprises regarding the working environment, but none of these other attempts seem to have been more than short term projects which have not been particularly successful and which have not lead to any permanent change. This indicates that there is a need either for more interest in and expertise of working environment issues to be developed, if other people or groups are to be more active within this field, or for some kind of incentive to be offered for these other groups to include working environment within their regular work.
- B. Broad programmes that, over the course of a few years, support small enterprises in order to initiate working environment improvements. The Work Life Fund, which does not exist any more, and the EU programme Growth Potential Objective 4 which will not continue after Dec. 31, 1999, are the main examples of these kinds of broad programmes. These programmes are based on activities in many small enterprises, which are supported by many different actors, for example a number of consultants whose work in the enterprises, to quite a large extent, is paid for by grants from the programmes. These grants are given to the enterprise that hires the consultant. These programmes have started changes in many small enterprises. One development project, Meeting Point Sormland, shows similarities with this approach.
- C. Limited projects that are directed towards small enterprises. Very often these projects are not particularly concerned over the sustainability of the methods used, and there are no plans on how to use the knowledge gained in the project at a broader scale for example to reach small enterprises in the whole of Sweden or within an entire trade.

A hybrid of approaches A and C above is the work carried out at the Department of Occupational and Environmental Medicine at the Medical Centre Hospital in Örebro. This is an organisation that, in part, acts as an occupational health service with a focus on small enterprises in the region. At the same time, they are working with projects directed towards different trades. As the Department has a long-lasting commitment to work with small enterprises in the region, the relation to the trades they are concerned with is more sustainable than is usual for approaches

according to C above. Additionally they give advice to small enterprises based on their demands.

One of the projects, included in section C above, that more explicitly used intermediaries in their approach is the Sormland project, which aimed at reaching small enterprises through their normal contacts with Regional Safety Representatives and safety engineers at the occupational health services. These groups were given new tools and instructions, which aimed at supporting the enterprises in improving their own working environment by using checklists that were developed to suit the enterprises (not the intermediaries). The most important part of this project was that the intermediaries were expected to support the enterprises in their improvement of the working environment, not to assist in the improvement as such. That kind of assistance was in a way the next step. For those enterprises that could not solve specific problems themselves, the intermediaries could assist regarding the specific problem, when they were asked to do so.

5.2 Successful and sustainable

Among the different approaches described above, there are projects that are more or less successful and more or less sustainable.

Here the following definitions of success and sustainability are used.

Successful: A method which leads to marked improvements of the working environment in at least one third of the target groups and to some improvements in another third. As small enterprises are a very difficult group to work with, it is not realistic to require much higher rates of success. These figures were obtained in the Sormland project, in a group of 24 small enterprises and may serve as a reference (Antonsson et al. 1989).

Sustainable: A method which is based on available resources and infrastructure and which can be widely used to improve working environment in small enterprises, without any changes that require a lot of resources.

In table 13 an overview of the different projects and approaches in relation to the criteria successful and sustainable is given.

Table 13. Classification of different methods according to the three approaches above and in relation to the criteria successful and sustainable.

Approach	Agent/method/programme/project	Successful	Sustainable	Comments
A	Regional Safety Representatives	Yes ¹	Yes	
	Occupational health service	Yes ¹	Yes	Many small enterprises are not attached
	The Work Environment Inspectorate	Yes ¹	Yes	Many small enterprises are not visited
B	Work Life Fund	Yes	No	Not in existence anymore
	Growth Potential Objective 4	Yes	Maybe	Not in existence anymore, may continue with a somewhat different focus
C	The Sormland project	Yes	Maybe	Parts of experience used within other contexts

1) As there is a lack of evaluation of the results of several of the approaches, the judgement of how successful the projects are is purely subjective and made by the author.

I have chosen two of the approaches above for further discussion. The approaches are:

- The Regional Safety Representatives.
- Growth potential objective 4.

These approaches and activities are based on approach A and B above. Safety representatives have been chosen as they reach more small enterprises than both the Work Environment Inspectorate and the occupational health service.

I have chosen Growth Potential Objective 4, as this kind of programme will probably recur as part of the support to the development of small enterprises from the European Union. Additionally, this programme has its main focus on competence and thus may have a major impact on the psychosocial aspects of the working environment.

5.3 Regional Safety Representatives, RSR

5.3.1 Background to RSRs

In Sweden, Regional Safety Representatives, RSRs, have visited small enterprises to check their working environment since 1949. In 1949 RSRs were appointed for the building and forestry industries where it was difficult to appoint local safety representatives. From 1974 the RSR system was extended to the whole of working life and for those enterprises whose workforces included at least one member of a trade union. The target group for RSRs is small private enterprises with less than 50 employees that are not part of a larger group. The existence of in-house safety representatives does not in any way limit the work of the RSRs.

The RSRs usually work at a large enterprise and work as an RSR usually on a part time basis, although there are some full-time RSRs. Usually they act as safety representatives at their regular job. All RSRs are attached to the unions, for blue collar, white collar and academically qualified workers, and are paid for by the unions. Even though the RSRs work for the unions, they have, to a large extent,

been financed by the enterprises. Until midway through 1995 the trade unions were reimbursed their RSR costs through the Working Environment Fund. The Fund originally got its money from a tax on the total wage sum. Parts of this tax covered RSR activities. The Fund was then reorganised and the contribution from enterprises was redirected through the Treasury. Today the trade unions are reimbursed from the state budget, presently under the administration of the National Institute of Working Life.

Although the amount of the refund/subsidy increased until 1993 (with a decline thereafter), the trade unions have, since 1983, reported RSR costs exceeding the subsidy they received because the system expanded during the 1980s when RSRs were appointed to cover most of even the very smallest workplaces. The unions have increasingly met these extra costs themselves. In 1997 the total subsidy was 72.5 million SEK, but the LO unions contributed an additional 33 million SEK (33 per cent of their total RSR costs) and the TCO unions, an additional 8.2 million SEK (70 per cent of their costs). Previous studies have already highlighted the limited resources available for RSR activities, suggesting that this affects the ability of the RSRs to perform their functions fully (Frick & Walters 1998).

According to an investigation from 1995 (Frick 1996) the characteristics of RSRs are as follows:

- 74 per cent of RSRs in LO and 87 per cent of RSRs in TCO are between 41 and 60 years.
- 89 per cent of RSRs in LO and 89 per cent in TCO are male.
- RSRs have usually got several years of experience. 40 per cent of RSRs in LO and 19 per cent in TCO had been RSRs for at least nine years. 16 and 34 per cent respectively had been RSRs for 1-2 years.
- Almost all RSRs have taken the basic course Safety, Health and Working Conditions together with several other courses. On average RSRs in LO had taken 4.6 courses and in TCO on average 3.9, about various aspects of the working environment.

Trade unions organise RSRs depending on conditions within the sectors in which they are active. This has resulted in three main types of RSRs (Frick & Walters 1998):

- senior health and safety representatives in large enterprises who extend their representative activities to cover employees in small enterprises in their locality;
- union officers who are also RSRs as part of their trade union function (mainly in construction unions); and
- full-time RSRs (this is the norm in the transport and farm workers unions).

5.3.2 The aim of RSR activities

As defined by legislation, their tasks are threefold (ibid.):

- to act as itinerant safety representatives who inspect and investigate occupational health and safety conditions in small enterprises and request such changes as they consider necessary to achieve improvements in the working environment;

- to promote employee participation in occupational health and safety work, including the recruitment, training and support of in-house health and safety representatives; and
- to activate local health and safety work, within the overall framework of 'systematic work environment management', in small enterprises.

5.3.3 *The extent of RSR activities*

In 1995 the number of safety representatives was about:

- 1 400 from the Swedish Trade Union Confederation, LO,
- 100 from the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees, TCO,
- 20 from one organisation within the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations, organising academics within the church,

making a total of about 1 500 RSRs. They made about 65 000 visits at small establishments, which corresponds to about one visit every 2 or 3 years.

About 90 per cent of the RSRs work part time as RSRs. Their work corresponds to about 300 fulltime-RSRs. There is an RSR for almost every small enterprise that has at least one employee that is a member of a union. About 25 000 small enterprises have not got RSRs, mainly because their employees are not organised in trade unions.

The target group of RSRs consist of approximately 166 000 enterprises spread over about 175 000 establishments. In 1995 they had almost 700 000 employees, an average of four employees per establishment. About 90 per cent of the enterprises visited by Regional Safety Representatives have nine employees or less (Frick 1996).

From table 1, we can see that there are about 184 000 enterprises (1998) with one to 49 employees. This means that Regional Safety Representatives cover about 90 per cent of small enterprises with employees.

In order to put these costs into perspective, it is interesting to compare them with those of the senior safety representatives. There are indeed parallels between the work of such representatives in the various units or departments of large enterprises and that of the RSRs. For example, in both cases, their function is to support small units with expertise and to promote local-level initiatives. Covering from between 500-700 workers in manufacturing to 1 000-1 500 workers in the health and service sectors, senior representatives may operate on a full-time basis at the expense of the employer. Regional Safety Representatives cover far greater numbers of employees, with an average ratio of around 1:2 500. In absolute terms, the cost of OHS supervision and support per employee is thus considerably less when these tasks are performed by a RSR covering small enterprises than it is when performed by a senior safety representative in a large workplace (Frick & Walters 1998).

Several studies indicate that RSRs tend to concentrate on the first task, to inspect and investigate occupational health and safety conditions and request changes (ibid., Frick 1979). In 1980 the RSRs spent 50 per cent of their time inspecting and investigating workplaces, and a further ten per cent on revisits to verify that promised remedial action had been taken (Leymann et al. 1982). It is

concluded that the acute health and safety problems the RSRs encountered during their visits left them little time to carry out their other tasks, to activate local health and safety work. It is also clear from these earlier studies that the RSRs found the task of inspecting/-investigating workplaces the most straightforward of their functions. These findings were confirmed by a recent survey, which further shows RSR campaigns on specific issues to be essentially inspection related (Frick & Walters 1998).

The recent survey indicates that the RSRs are aware of their three functions, see section 5.3.2 and perform them to varying degrees. In practice, the definition of their tasks as specified in the relevant legislation means that these are often performed simultaneously, through a combination of activities. When asked how they perceived their role, over 70 per cent of LO representatives saw themselves as problem solvers and educators. 55 per cent saw themselves as monitors and inspectors of the working environment, and only 36 per cent as being there to make sure that workers followed health and safety rules (ibid.). RSRs reported that they perceived activating health and safety work as their most important task. When RSRs from LO were asked what 'activating' involved, 80 per cent of them said it consisted in registering and solving problems and 78 per cent suggested it involved educating in-house safety representatives and managers. These and other similar answers indicate a strong emphasis on advice and expertise as a co-operation-oriented means of influencing employers. Though this influence is mainly intended to solve concrete problems, its contribution to local knowledge and awareness can also help to raise interest in improving the working environment of small enterprises more generally and to bolster the in-house competence needed for doing so (ibid.).

5.3.4 Evaluation of RSR activities

Frick and Walters (1989) state that the RSR scheme constitutes a major form of occupational health and safety support for small enterprises. In fact, there is no comparable scheme operating on this scale. RSRs may visit small enterprises at least once every two years. This compares very favourably with an average of one visit every 8-10 years by a work environment inspector and a 20-40 per cent affiliation rate of these enterprises to Occupational Health Services (which in small enterprises often only offer health checks and no preventive activities). As for in-house safety representatives, they are appointed at only one-fifth of the workplaces covered by RSRs (ibid.).

On average, current resources allow RSRs to visit each of the small enterprises in their constituencies once every 2.5 years. But the trade unions estimate that in order to perform their functions effectively the RSRs need one to one-and-a-half days per workplace per year (Frick 1979). To achieve this ratio in all eligible workplaces would entail a threefold increase in the cost of the scheme, bringing it level with the costs incurred for senior safety representatives in large workplaces (Frick & Walters 1998).

A recent survey shows that the RSRs generally considered they enjoyed a reasonable level of co-operation with employers in small enterprises despite occasional confusion over the nature of their functions. The latter is probably due

to the different tasks they have been assigned in separate pieces of legislation since the 1970s, see section 5.3.2.

Variations in the organisation of RSR work as is the case between the LO-affiliated unions highlighted an awareness of the importance of the ‘activating’ role. For example, in private sector service unions, whose membership is concentrated in very small workplaces, the RSRs made special efforts to get in-house representatives nominated in all enterprises employing more than five workers. Once elected, such representatives handle most health and safety issues themselves, with limited support from the RSRs, leaving the latter with more time for the smallest enterprises that have no in-house representatives. It is important however to note that RSRs are not substitutes for in-house representatives. Rather they complement and support them and their workplaces.

Although a complete evaluation of the results of the RSR scheme in terms of reduced injuries and diseases was not possible in the recent survey (*ibid.*), the investigation identified some kinds of injuries which may have been prevented through the actions of RSRs. For example (the following, along with some other sections of paragraphs 5.3 are directly cited from (*ibid.*)),

- “RSRs in the transport industry checked 2 250 containers. More than half of them were defective and violated safety regulations; 320 were stopped as acutely dangerous.
- In the baking industry, after many serious hand injuries from machinery accidents, the RSRs, in co-operation with the Work Environment Inspectorate, launched a campaign against improperly guarded baking machinery. From 1989-92 to 1993-96 reported sick leave due to machine-related injuries among bakery workers dropped from 2 500-3 000 to 1 500-2 000 days per year. The RSRs are estimated to have played a major role in achieving this reduction, but it is not possible to ascertain each actor’s exact contribution.
- In the construction industry, RSRs regularly advise on proper scaffolding and on the handling of dangerous chemicals. When nothing else helps, they intervene to stop jobs that they regard as an immediate danger.
- In the retail sector where workers are exposed *inter alia* to severe cases of repetitive strain injury many shop-owners responded positively to RSR interventions, saying it was good that somebody who knew the rules could advise them on what to do (e.g. on cashier ergonomics or robbery protection).

The RSRs often work on conflict resolution. This is especially true of those from the white-collar unions of TCO, whose members and other salaried personnel typically have a sensitive in between position in small enterprises. As work-related suicides are estimated to be more common than fatal injuries, this is considered to be important preventive work.

The survey also showed that the RSRs enjoyed good relations with the Work Environment Inspectorate. Other reasons for regarding the scheme as successful include the following:

- RSRs engage in a dialogue with nearly all the owner-managers of the small enterprises they visit. Few of their visits to 65 000 workplaces per year result in major disagreements with the owner-managers;

- RSRs are able to show some 'muscle' in their actions in relation to the minority of recalcitrant employers encountered. Occasionally they stop jobs (15 per cent of the LO RSRs had done this during the previous year) or call in the Work Environment Inspectorate, which usually supports the RSR;
- A number of examples (including those given above) and estimates by employers' representatives and other informed sources indicate that the RSRs' activities make a major contribution to improving the work environment and, consequently, to reducing the incidence of occupational injuries and diseases;
- The cost of the RSRs' preventive work is comparatively low and around a third of it is borne by the unions;
- RSRs also are cost-effective in the sense that they regularly advise employers on how to reduce hazards at low cost. With their experience and broad view of their industry, they can often suggest ways of resolving problems through the use of internal resources only" (ibid.).

The limitation of the RSR scheme is obviously that it does not solve all problems. Many risks remain. Additionally RSRs are sometimes criticised by the Swedish Employers Federation (SAF) for misinterpreting regulations, posing unreasonable demands on enterprises, acting as inspectors rather than labour union representative, not respecting enterprises and bursting in without any previous notification. All in all, this critique is not very frequent when put in relation to the extent of RSR activities. SAF has also criticised RSRs for not doing their job when mainly focussing on problem solving instead of supporting the local health and safety work, a criticism which seems to be supported by findings in several studies (ibid., Leymann et al. 1982).

5.3.5 Discussion

Frick and Walters (1998) have discussed the role of RSRs and to what extent it is possible to support and improve local work regarding the working environment.

"Besides, while it may be desirable to shift the responsibility for inspection and related matters to internal health and safety systems, there are several reasons why this is difficult to do in practice. First, management systems in small workplaces are underdeveloped, especially as regards quality assurance of the working environment. Second, both employers and employees in small enterprises have limited experience of the technical, legal and managerial aspects of health and safety, negligible health and safety training and scant knowledge of the relevant statutory health and safety requirements. And third, it is hard to improve such poor resources for prevention within small enterprises when around 90 per cent of SMEs have fewer than ten employees, and only some 20 per cent of them have in-house safety representatives.

Although the RSRs are there to help to alleviate these problems and to build up a more participatory and informed approach, workplace realities cause them to focus on individual hazards which in-house health and safety management has failed to detect and remove. Even where they succeed in developing some employee participation, their mandate requires that they remain in contact with the workplaces and provide advice and training to the workers involved in the

participatory process. When this approach is actively followed, however, the RSRs face a further criticism from employers, that of abusing their health and safety position by using it to extend general trade union organisation within the small enterprise.

Though the RSRs may work at the task of activating health and safety work, they are trade union representatives. As such they cannot be responsible for how employers fulfil their statutory obligations for health and safety management.”

Additionally results from an ongoing project* indicate that RSRs are mainly trained to focus on physical problems in the working environment whereas the implementation of some kind of management system for health and safety require competence regarding how to support change processes in enterprises. Workers participation is important in such change processes, but it is also important to motivate the manager to put in the work and resources required for the change process. This is a much more complicated task for RSRs than discussing limited problems in the working environment and solutions to those problems.

Frick and Walters (1998) also conclude that the results from the recent study on RSRs indicate that

”improvements are needed in the extent and quality of the training and support that RSRs receive. The study also revealed that the role of RSRs has been largely overlooked in previous discussions. RSRs concentration on supervising/ inspecting the working environment and the difficulties they experience in extending their role to include the activation of the joint organisation of health and safety within small workplaces, and the criticism that they are too formal and prescriptive in their approach to inspection and excessive in their demands for remedial action, all of these may be explained by the particular position of the RSRs as outsiders in relation to the social dialogue that exists within small workplaces. RSRs spend a limited amount of time in individual small enterprises and are not part of their industrial relations structures or processes.

RSRs need both time and skill to gain sufficient trust from employees and employers before they can be expected to make significant progress in activating health and safety organisation. The kind of skill this requires is unlikely to be the same as that needed by insiders within the industrial relations systems of larger enterprises, which is where the current emphasis of training provision lies. While training clearly has a role to play in improving the effectiveness of the RSRs, it is important that those who provide it should recognise their unique position as outsiders and take particular account of this in the design of training.”

This conclusion is supported by the experiences from the ongoing project (see previous footnote). The competence to support change processes in small enterprises is especially difficult for RSRs as they only visit the enterprises occasionally, e.g. once a year. Thus they can often only wish that their impact will motivate the small enterprise owner to act and improve the working environment

* Ongoing project Träffpunkt Sörmland (Meeting Point Sormland). Prevent. Ann-Beth Antonsson is member of the working group which steers the project.

on his or her own, and not only wait until the next visit. RSRs do not have appropriate or enough training to deal with this difficult task. According to the experiences from the ongoing project, there is today no other group of professionals, which obviously can manage that difficult task.

Frick and Walters (ibid.) continue to conclude that

”The Swedish scheme is indeed unique in Europe on account of its magnitude, its statutory basis and its success. The latter, in turn, can partly be attributed to a unique institutional environment that includes a favourable industrial relations setting, exceptionally high trade union density (including amongst small enterprises), a tradition of social dialogue and acceptance of union representation in general, and a high level of awareness and wide acceptance of occupational health and safety as an important and legitimate goal. These factors have contributed to making public funding available for Sweden’s RSR scheme. But they are largely absent from the majority of other European countries. Similarly, in Australia and in Canada, where safety representatives operate in several states/provinces, they seldom cover small enterprises as these have such a low rate of unionisation.”

Obviously, Swedish RSRs have the possibility to reach almost all small enterprises and do in fact visit the majority of them. RSRs have a far better coverage than both the supervising authority, the Work Environment Inspectorate, and the Occupational Health Services. RSRs have substantially contributed to the improvement of Swedish working environments during the last decades of the twentieth century.

5.4 Growth Potential Objective 4, GPO4

5.4.1 Background to GPO4

The EU initiative Growth potential Objective 4 is a programme within the European Social Fund to support the development of employees’ competence, conjointly with changes to the organisation of work and industrial development. Thus it supports change processes within enterprises. One main aim in this programme is to strengthen the employee’s position on the labour market and thus their employability. The target group for this programme is small enterprises with up to 50 employees, but also medium-sized enterprises (up to 250 employees) may apply for funding. In Sweden parts of the public sector such as departments within health care and social care may also apply for funding from GPO4. This programme focuses strongly on both changes in the organisation of work and the development of employees’ competence, which means that it in fact deals with the psycho-social aspects of the working environment.

GPO4 is a four-year project which started on July 12 1996. GPO4 is financed with 25 per cent from the European Social Fund, 25 per cent from Swedish public finances and 50 per cent from participating enterprises. The total budget for GPO4 in Sweden is 5.1 billion SEK (more than 600 million ECU) during the years 1996-1999. The grants are paid to the enterprises when the projects have been completed.

5.4.2 What are they doing in GPO4 projects?

The projects in participating enterprises are divided into two steps (Kvarnström & Lindén 1999, Klasson et al. 1999, IM-gruppens rapport 1999).

Step 1 aims at analysing the activities of the enterprises and the need to improve employee's competence. This analysis is made in co-operation between management and employees. Some requirements that have to be fulfilled are;

- All employees have to take part.
- Women's situation at the workplace has to be considered.
- The aim of the analysis is a dynamic change of the organisation of work.
- The resulting plan should describe employee's competence and knowledge and on the basis of that description a plan for future development should be made. Management and employees describe how they together can work to reach this development.

As a support for the analysis in step 1, many intermediaries/enterprises have used specific tools for the analysis of enterprise prerequisites and needs. These tools seem to focus on the change process, putting a lot of emphasis on participation, thus guiding enterprises through the process of analysing their present situation and needs for the future.

Step 2 is about making the plans come through. As the plans are made individually for each enterprise and its employees, the activities in step 2 may vary a lot. Sometimes focus is on radical changes in the entire enterprise, sometimes restricted to one part of the enterprise or the development of competence in a few employees. How rapidly the changes are implemented is decided between the enterprise and the funding Swedish body.

To facilitate the handling of applications for funding, each county has a regional body dealing with the applications for that county. Additionally in each county there is a steering group with employers' and employees' representatives (SAF, LO, TCO, SACO) and The Federation of Private Enterprises together with representatives for public actors. These regional groups seem to have been of great importance to the success of GPO4, as they collectively represent a broad body of knowledge about many of the enterprises active in the county.

5.4.3 The extent of GPO4 activities

By March 1998 GPO4 had funded projects within 14 632 establishments. Almost 2/3 are active in the service sector. About 18 per cent of the establishments are in the retail sector. Only the manufacturing industry has got more establishments involved in GPO4 projects than the retail sector.

An evaluation of enterprises with accepted programmes within GPO4, shows some interesting characteristics compared to enterprises without such programmes (Kvarnström & Lindén 1999):

- The share of enterprises within the service sector with programmes is about the same as this sector's share of all enterprises in Sweden.
- The share of enterprises within the retail sector (which is part of the service sector) with programmes is lower than this sector's share of all enterprises.

- The share of enterprises within the manufacturing industry with programmes is higher than this sector's share of all enterprises.
- Even though more than 30 per cent of enterprises with programmes are situated in regions around the large cities, these regions are under-represented in relation to their share of all enterprises.
- The proportion of women within enterprises amongst the two groups was about the same. In micro-enterprises with GPO4 projects women seemed to be over-represented.
- The enterprises with GPO4 projects seem to have about the same distribution of size (number of employees) as enterprises without such projects.
- In enterprises with GPO4 projects employees seem to be of about the same age or somewhat younger than in average enterprises.
- Enterprises with GPO4 projects have significantly fewer employees with academic education, which indicates that the programme has to some extent succeeded in reaching those people with the highest needs for competence development.
- Small enterprises that are parts of a group are over-represented which seems to indicate that such enterprises influence each other to start GPO4 projects.
- 96 per cent of enterprises within GPO4 had not received any other kind of financial support during the last five years. 37 per cent of the enterprises had hired a consultant during the last five years (Klasson et al. 1999). 14 per cent said they had got financial support from the Work Life Fund. Thus GPO4 seems to have reached enterprises without previous experience of external support.
- Another evaluation (IM-gruppens rapport 1999) concludes that even if small enterprises in the GPO4 programme had limited experience of external support, the majority of them had experiences from competence development. For small enterprises without such experiences, GPO4 support was essential to get started.

To summarize, GPO4 has been extraordinarily successful in reaching their target group and especially the enterprises that are usually considered as hard to reach as the micro-companies, the retail sector, enterprises with few employees with academic education and enterprises outside the large cities.

As the programme has recently been terminated, there are few overall evaluations of the programme. Some evaluations have been made during the programme and the results of these evaluations have been used in this description of GPO4 (Hultman & Klasson 1999, Kvarnström & Lindén 1999, Axring & Nilsson 1999, Klasson et al. 1999, IM-gruppens rapport 1999).

One evaluation based on telephone interviews in 584 enterprises focussed on the development of expert competence. 87.3 per cent of the enterprises claimed they needed to develop their expert competence in one or several areas (Klasson et al. 1999). In general, the perceived needs concerned:

- Leadership/management (which has implications for the working environment);

- Marketing;
- CAD / CAM, especially in enterprises working with technical construction in some way.

In the report from this study (Axring & Nilsson 1999) some personal remarks are given:

- Even though the enterprises claim they have not got much time during follow-up interviews, they have often ended up holding long discussions on topics relating to GPO4 and their project. This was interpreted as a reflection of the managers' needs to discuss these topics and the lack of people and circumstances available for actually doing so.
- Spontaneous comments were frequent stating that the work relating to GPO4 has been very positive and rewarding. The enterprises have got tools and a structure for dealing with these topics, which they did not have earlier.
- Many enterprises have commented on the time limit (six months for step 1) and the requirement for an action plan as something positive. This provided the pressure they needed to start working.
- Some enterprises have said that without GPO4 they would have probably done nothing and that they needed GPO4 to improve their enterprise.
- In some enterprises the methods used in GPO4 projects seem to be appreciated to such an extent that enterprises will probably keep using the methods. Some enterprises have, for example, stated that they will keep on doing the analysis according to step 1 regularly in the future.
- All enterprises are not entirely positive towards GPO4. Criticism from enterprises concern, for example, what is apprehended as excessive requirements on economic accounting.

To summarise, the enterprises opinion on GPO4 seems to be very positive regarding the outcome in the enterprises. The limited criticism is mainly about topics small enterprises usually complain about – too much bureaucracy.

5.4.4 Evaluation of GPO4 activities

An evaluation of GPO4 presented in September 1999 (three months before the programme ceased), came to the following conclusions about the programme (IM-gruppens rapport 1999):

- GPO4 will not reach the planned volume. This is mainly due to prioritising quality before quantity and is thus perceived as an acceptable outcome.
- The funding to enterprises has, to a great extent, been well used: 97 per cent of granted projects are fulfilled, which is a very high number. 87 per cent of initiated programmes (step 1) continue with step 2. More micro-enterprises than larger enterprises drop out and do not continue with step 2. It is impossible, at the moment, to evaluate how many of the step 2 projects are fulfilled.
- Small enterprises have been included fairly well within the programme. Micro-enterprises are under-represented.
- The degree of participation relates positively to the outcome of the projects.

- The tools mentioned in section 5.4.2 have been supportive, especially for small enterprises not used to working with change processes. The tools have been a valued support and have structured the process of change.

In table 14 enterprises with GPO4 projects are compiled according to size and sector.

Table 14. Enterprises with GPO4 projects until March 1998 (Axring & Nilsson 1999). Numbers compared with all enterprises in Sweden broken down by size, see table 6.

Sector	Number of employees				Share of all enterprises
	0-4	5-19	20-49	>50	
Manufacturing sector	2.6	10.6	7.6	4.7	25.5
Service sector	18.7	34.7	13.1	6.2	72.7
Other	0.7	1.0	0.3	0.1	2.1
All in GPO4	22.0	46.3	21.0	11.0	100
Fraction of all enterprises	92.4	5.9	1.1	0.7	
-"-, excluding self-employed	69.2	23.3	4.5	2.9	

The most important goals in the local projects are described below (Hultman & Klasson 1999):

- Improve employees' technical competence and skills (50 per cent).
- Strengthen the enterprises position on the market (45 per cent).
- Improve efficiency in enterprise activities (42 per cent).
- Improve quality in production (36 per cent).
- Improve the capability within the organisation for dealing with change (26 per cent).
- Improve the competence amongst employees with the shortest education (21 per cent).
- Improve participation in the process of change (20 per cent).
- Improve the social climate at work and within the work place (18 per cent).
- Decentralise and delegate responsibilities (16 per cent).
- Develop relations with customers (13 per cent).
- Better planning of work force and production (11 per cent).
- Improve employees' social skills (7 per cent).
- Improve employees' employability (5 per cent).
- Develop the decision making process within the enterprise (2 per cent).

One evaluation shows that on average it took up to five days to write the application in step 1. This went quite smoothly (Klasson et al. 1999). The analysis took, on average, 15 days (50 per cent say more than eleven days). About five days were spent on accounting for step 1. There are, however, considerable differences between counties, which may reflect differences in the demands made and the methods used.

In step 1 participation from employees seems very good. 85 per cent of enterprises (from a question to managers) say that employees took part either often or very often in the activities of step 1. 72 per cent took an active part in the develop-

ment of the action plan, even though the writing was mainly carried out by the managers (ibid.) (or perhaps by consultants).

The enterprises say they had enough resources both for the analysis and for producing the action plan, even if 66 per cent say it was difficult to find the time alongside ordinary work. 67 per cent say they did not co-operate with a consultant or only had some minor co-operation for step 1. 38 per cent say they had co-operated to a large extent with the local EU-office and 35 per cent say they had not co-operated with anybody (ibid.).

An evaluation of enterprises with support from the EU-programme Growth potential Objective 4, shows that only 12 per cent of 945 enterprises from three counties had co-operated to a large or very large extent with other enterprises during the first phase of their work with this programme. 19 per cent had co-operated with other enterprises in their trade. In this specific case the idea to get into this programme originated in 31 per cent of cases from personal business contacts (Hultman & Klasson 1999). The initiative to start working with the programme came in 39 per cent from consultants, 9 per cent from accountant, and 37 per cent from representatives from the Swedish EU programme office. These figures show that personal contacts are of great importance when starting activities in small enterprises but also that the contacts may be other than those based purely on business relations.

Even if all the goals have not been fulfilled, GPO4 this far seems to be a successful programme. The target group for the programme is recognised as a difficult target group to work with. Nevertheless the support from GPO4 has initiated active work in many small enterprises. Additionally, most of the small enterprises have managed to work with the change process themselves, with limited support from experts and others.

5.4.5 Discussion

The GPO4 programme is of great interest from several different perspectives:

- The GPO4 programme seems to have started projects especially in enterprises with 5-19 employees and also in many micro-enterprises. This is remarkable! Such figures have to the best of my knowledge never been presented before in any project of this size relating to working environment in small enterprises. Even though the GPO4 programme has started activities in micro and small enterprises, large enterprises are over-represented in relation to their share of enterprises. As the GPO4 programme especially aimed at small enterprises this is noticeable. It also reflects the normal situation where larger enterprises seem to more effectively make use of different kinds of resources.
- The GPO4 programme deals with factors affecting the working environment but deals with them from a business point of view. This means that if the intermediaries supporting enterprises include working environment aspects as being important in their work, enterprises could be able to deal with working environment aspects from a holistic perspective. The holistic approach is often argued to be the best approach when working with small enterprises.
- The intermediaries working with small enterprises are very heterogeneous and are thus not easily described. The representatives of the regional EU program-

me office seem to have been of great importance. Other types of intermediaries are mainly chosen by the enterprises, even if the intermediaries probably often approach enterprises with some suggestions of their own. As intermediaries can act as a key to financing a project within enterprises, they have something to offer enterprises. At the same time it is obvious to the enterprises that they will not only get money, they have to put money/time into the project from their own budget. Thus they should be less prone to just see the GPO4 programme as just a source of some extra funding.

- Even if intermediaries have supported the majority of enterprises, varying from some support to a lot of support, many small enterprises seem to have managed on their own. An interpretation of this could be that as the projects are perceived as important to the enterprises, this motivation in combination with the tools developed to support small enterprises is enough for some of them to get started (step 1). Consultants have then been used in step 2 for education and other expert oriented tasks. This reflects the multiple demands placed on intermediaries working with small enterprises. Sometimes they are required to give a lot of support during the initial process including motivation, sometimes to give limited support and sometimes providing expert support during a second phase.
- The GPO4 programme seems to have reached a very large proportion of enterprises within the service sector. This is especially interesting as this sector is normally considered to be extremely difficult to reach when discussing the working environment. It is sometimes argued that they are not interested, as they do not recognise working environment problems in their own enterprises. Still there are obvious working environment problems in this sector, though often related to the psycho-social aspects. It seems that GPO4 has succeeded in catching the eye of managers in this sector through relating to business and thus has made the enterprises deal with issues that, to quite a large extent, relate to their working environment.

6. Discussion

Small enterprises in Sweden have access to some, although limited, supportive structures for their work regarding occupational health and safety. Compulsory support through regional safety representatives seems to be the most important, as it reaches more than 90 per cent of small enterprises. The Work Environment Inspectorate reaches many small enterprises, although far less than the regional safety representatives. The structures which are used voluntarily, for example, the Occupational Health Services (although advocated in agreements between the social partners), are used by quite a large fraction of small enterprises. Still, there are more companies unattached to such services than attached. Most micro-companies are unattached.

This reflects a situation where most small enterprises will, at least occasionally, get some kind of advice or notification on occupational health and safety. As the advice and notification concern physical health hazards, the existence of these intermediaries most likely contributes to the elimination of some major hazards and a fairly good standard of occupational health and safety, which, for example, is reflected in relatively few fatal accidents. There is however limited or non-existent research on what factors that have led to the decrease in fatal accidents in small enterprises. Additionally, research is needed to investigate if statistics are reliable.

Even though fatal work-related accidents have decreased and there are few in Sweden, the rate still seems to be higher in small enterprises. This is in contrast with the statistics on accidents and diseases, which usually show lower rates in small companies. A deeper study assessing the reliability of the statistics is well motivated.

Compared to large enterprises, statistics show that small enterprises;

- to a lesser degree have contracts with occupational health services;
- have less contact with regional safety representatives than large enterprises with senior safety representatives;
- have fewer inspections per employee from the Work Environment Inspectorate.

It is obvious that small enterprises have the greatest need for some kind of support regarding occupational safety and health, as their own knowledge and resources are scarce. In reality, most small enterprises do not seem to perceive this need, but rather describe their own working environment as good or average. Therefore, they are reluctant to seek support regarding occupational health and safety. In this perspective, it is very important to have compulsory supportive structures that reach a large fraction of small enterprises.

When comparing the intermediaries available, it seems obvious that there are two different types:

- Intermediaries focusing on traditional safety and physical and chemical health hazards. These are the traditional organisations such as the Work Environment

Inspectorate, regional safety representatives and the Occupational Health Services.

- Intermediaries mainly focusing on business development but also including different aspects of the working environment such as competence, work organisation and other psychosocial aspects. These intermediaries are less easy to define, as they are usually consultants in different sectors. Additionally, the psychosocial factors are included in their work, as it is demanded from the programs giving grants for specific projects. Examples are the Growth Potential Objective 4 and, to some extent, the Swedish Work Life Fund (Arbetslivsfonden) even though this fund is mainly aimed at improving the working environment but strongly emphasises the development of work organisation.

Even if the traditional intermediaries occasionally touch on topics regarding the psychosocial working environment, these aspects are a more integrated part of projects related to business development. These projects often include aspects directly linked to new production processes, which, in many cases (although not always), are favourable for the psychosocial working environment. Such aspects include; development of workers competence linked to more varied work tasks and increased responsibilities and a new work organisation with managers as team leaders instead of traditional supervisor.

From this perspective, Sweden has a basic supportive structure, which seems to provide fairly good health and safety in small enterprises, although it is also easy to see limitations and possibilities for improvement in the present structure.

Sweden also has good experiences with programs aimed at business development, which at the same time, include aspects of occupational health and safety. These time-limited programs are to a larger extent governed by the small enterprises themselves, even if the content is partly decided by the terms for obtaining grants. Even if these programs cover fewer enterprises, they are still interesting as they probably result in more profound changes regarding the work organisation than the traditional health and safety intermediaries.

For the future, one question relating to intermediaries has to be discussed. What should be the main focus of the traditional intermediaries? These intermediaries are the society's main tools to deal with health and safety issues in small enterprises. Should they focus on the traditional health and safety issues or the change processes in small enterprises, relating to systematic work environment management and development of the work organisation, development of the competence and improvement of the psychosocial working environment?

Since the regulation on systematic work environment management, SWEM, came into force, the traditional intermediaries have worked a lot with the implementation of SWEM. From the description above of regional safety representatives, it seems obvious that implementation of SWEM is a change process but regional safety representatives have too little time to spend in each company to be able to effectively support the change process required to implement SWEM. Is it realistic that the traditional intermediaries can support such change processes? If yes, can they do it today or do they require development of their own skills in this

area? Is it realistic to assume that traditional intermediaries can initiate change processes in small enterprises during just one short visit every year?

The experiences from GPO4 indicate that many small enterprises can govern a change process themselves with limited support. This is under the condition that the enterprise itself is very motivated to put in all the time and efforts required. In the GPO4 projects one motivation was related to the grants given to the enterprises, another to the step 1 analysis of the enterprise, which was made from a business point of view. The analysis pointed out needs relating to competence development and change of the work organisation. This is not the condition when the traditional intermediaries try to support the implementation of SWEM, why the change process required to implement SWEM is harder to get started.

7. Conclusions

To conclude, there are a lot of problems in improving health and safety, which are easy to relate to small enterprises. Lack of time and knowledge as well as negligence of occupational health and safety in the small enterprises together with unstructured management of them, are factors impairing work regarding occupational health and safety. The overview given in this report shows that there are means of overcoming the deficiencies. Most of these methods are built on the presence of some kind of intermediary, a person informing, assisting and supporting small enterprises. As can be seen from the description there are many people who may act as intermediaries. Some of them have good knowledge about occupational health and safety, some just scarce knowledge. For the future, it is of great interest to study the intermediaries, their work and factors affecting the outcome of their work in more detail. The question of intermediaries as change agents or as problem solvers is also crucial.

An overview of health and safety in small companies as presented in this report also raises many new questions. Some of them are;

- What factors have lead to the decrease in fatal accidents and work-related accidents and diseases in small enterprises during the last decades of the 20th century?
- Are the statistics on work-related accidents and diseases in small enterprises reliable? There seems to be a contradiction between statistics on fatal accidents and other accidents and diseases.
- What can be done to increase small enterprises use of intermediaries despite the small enterprises' lack of understanding of the benefits with improving their working environment?

Sammanfattning

Denna rapport är den svenska delen av ett projekt inom SALTSA, Samarbetsprogrammet för arbetslivsforskning i Europa, med LO, TCO, SACO och Arbetslivsinstitutet som initiativtagare. Programmet syftar till samverkan för problemorienterad arbetslivsforskning i Europa. Rapporten ingår i SALTSA projektet "Health and safety in small enterprises in Europe: The significance and sustainability of the translator function of intermediaries in preventive health and safety".

Syftet med studien är:

- Att ge en översikt över arbetsmiljön i små företag, dvs företag med mindre än 50 anställda, i några länder inom EU, baserat på befintlig litteratur. Som en bakgrund beskrivs existerande infrastruktur som har betydelse för arbetsmiljön i små företag. Denna rapport beskriver situationen i Sverige. Andra rapporter finns för Danmark, Frankrike, Grekland, Italien, Spanien och Storbritannien.
- Att beskriva arbetsmiljön i svenska småföretag, mot bakgrund av bl a befintlig statistik. Detta ger underlag för internationella jämförelser.
- Att beskriva och i viss mån utvärdera några exempel på externa aktörer (intermediaries) som uthålligt och lyckosamt har bidragit till bättre arbetsmiljö i små företag. De två exempel som diskuteras mer i detalj i denna rapport är de fackliga regionala skyddsombuden och EU-programmet Tillväxt Mål 4.

Några slutsatser i rapporten är:

- Arbetskadestatistiken som gäller små företag borde utvärderas. Det finns indikationer på en underrapportering av arbetsskador i små företag.
- Den grupp externa aktörer som bäst når ut till små företag är regionala skyddsombud, men även Arbetsmiljöinspektionen och företagshälsovården är viktiga aktörer. Dessa är de "traditionella aktörerna".
- Sammantaget har svenska småföretag ett stöd för sitt arbetsmiljöarbete i form av regelbunden, om än ej omfattande personlig kontakt med de traditionella arbetsmiljöaktörer. Större företag får mer stöd än små företag.
- Förbättringen av arbetsmiljöerna på svenska småföretag, som den återspeglas i statistiken, beror sannolikt till stor del på dessa traditionella aktörers insatser.
- Under senare år har olika program som Arbetslivsfonden, Mål 4 och Mål 3 initierats och påverkat arbetsmiljön i små företag.
- Det går att se en skillnad mellan de traditionella aktörerna och de nya programmen, där de traditionella aktörerna mer inriktar sig på den fysiska arbetsmiljön och att bistå med problemlösning medan programmen syftar till att initiera förändringsarbete i företagen och ofta fokuserar på arbetsorganisationen.
- Dessa skillnader reser ett antal frågor om framtida utveckling av de traditionella aktörernas roll.

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